

A P R I L

2 5 C E N T S

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



No Time for Glory

Desperate adventure in Lower California that climaxed December 7th, 1941.

A complete novel.

by RICHARD SALE

Mr. Honey Escapes!

One pill wafted him back, briefly, to a former incarnation—but whether as king, slave or bullfrog, he couldn't foretell.

by BERTRAM ATKEY

Gunfire off Makapuu

U.S. ships in action off Hawaii—in 1813.

by JACLAND MARMUR

FREDERICK PAINTON

THE trouble with boiling forty-six years of living to four paragraphs is deciding what to leave out; your ego insists on so much getting in; and besides, when you've smelled printers' ink at the age of nineteen and followed the scent down the years, you accumulate a lot of queer experiences. I first played with words on the *Elmira* (N. Y.) *Advertiser*, and went into the First World War as an Air Service Sergeant, and ended on *The Stars and Stripes*, the official newspaper of the A. E. F. During a period on the New York *Telegram* and the *Tribune*, I managed to finish college at Columbia University, and wound up shortly afterward as the National Publicity Director of *The American Legion Magazine*. This involved an endless amount of travel that included three trips to Europe, chiefly to take eighteen thousand Legionnaires to their Paris Convention in 1927. Alas, poor Paris, I love you still!

After I discovered that editors would really buy my stories, I visited in Europe, the Near-East, Africa, and finally made a little *pasear* with the Fourth Regiment, Foreign Legion, from Marrakech into the Atlas. Sunstroke and dysentery, plus some sniping by Chluh with their *dak-o's*, made me realize that I was too old for that sort of thing.

Besides fiction, I have been doing stunt articles for magazines—such as enlisting in the New Army for a week, and flying in a Naval reconnaissance bomber out looking for U-boats in the Atlantic, and getting bruised in tanks and jeeps. Thank God, in these stunts you can sit down most of the time.

I am married to the same wife, have a son who wants to be a writer, (God forbid), play golf for a hobby, (ex-champ of the Artists and Writers Golf Ass'n), and do a lot of armchair adventuring in the pages of other guys' books. At present an air-raid spotter in World War II, but have hopes of a commission before it is over.



Who's Who in this Issue

JACLAND MARMUR

HE was born in Sosnowiec, Poland, February 14th, 1901. When two years old, his parents emigrated to the United States, settling in Brooklyn, N. Y., where he was educated in the public schools, graduating from the Brooklyn Boys' High School in 1917. It was the parental intention that he pursue the study of law, but this intention failed to take into account an inordinately restless nature. After several false starts at various odd jobs, he left home directly after the Armistice of 1918, crossing the continent to San Francisco with the vague intention of becoming a newspaper man.

When this ambition failed to materialize, Marmur shipped to sea, making a voyage to the Hawaiian Islands and another to Central American and Caribbean ports in an ocean tramp, returning to San Francisco after the vessel paid off. Here a friendship with a young Canadian water-color artist led to a trip afoot across Canada, supported by what game and fish the country yielded and by what farm labor could be had along the way. After a short and unsuccessful attempt to remain settled in New York, he returned to the West Coast and from here followed the sea professionally for over eight years, acquiring in this time a wife and the profound urge to write of the sea, ships, and the men who live in them.

In 1927, while in Hilo harbor in the old S.S. *Matsonia*, he received a cablegram advising the acceptance by a New York magazine of a short story called "Copra," his first published work, and shortly thereafter his first book, a short novel called "Ecola!" was published. Much of his early work was written while at sea in watches below until in 1929 he swallowed the anchor and settled ashore in the hills of Marin County, California, to devote all his time to writing. He is the author of more than a hundred short stories, appearing in such magazines as *Collier's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Country Gentleman*, *Blue Book*, and various English publications; and in translations into French and the Scandinavian languages.

The book "Ecola!" was followed by "Wind Driven" and later by "Three Went Armed," the last two novels being also published in England. "The Sea and the Shore" is his fourth novel, his largest canvas, and his most important full-length work.



BLUE BOOK

April, 1942

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Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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READERS' FORUM

MEDICINE FOR INTERNES

Why do I indulge in BLUE BOOK? How often have I been rudely awakened in the pre-dawn and been expected to have all my wits about me for some urgent medical, surgical, or obstetrical emergency!

And then the anticlimax—the attempt to relax afterward. From personal practical experience, I have found nothing that will serve the purpose better than to read to ease the strain gradually, and BLUE BOOK fills the bill more ideally than any of the myriads of magazines and books that I have sampled from time to time. . . .

Yours till you change your themes and style,

Paul B. Poindexter,
Portland, Oregon.

AT LONG LAST

At long last, a fiction magazine without an ad! What a relief to turn a page and go right on reading instead of gazing into the smiling teeth of a glamour gal who won fame and fortune by using Dr. Dento's tooth paste: or an equally glamorous gal who won with some facial treatment. How Mrs. Brown kept her home from the matrimonial rocks when Auntie sent her a bar of Whosis' soap, or how Mr. Jones landed a job when he blitzkrieged B. O. Or a quickie of baby, surrounded by admiring relatives, as he licks the spoon for more laxative and how all the vitamins in the alphabet are found in some breakfast food. The stories are tops, too.

Gene McArdle,
Lebanon, Kansas.

AN ADVENTURER HIMSELF

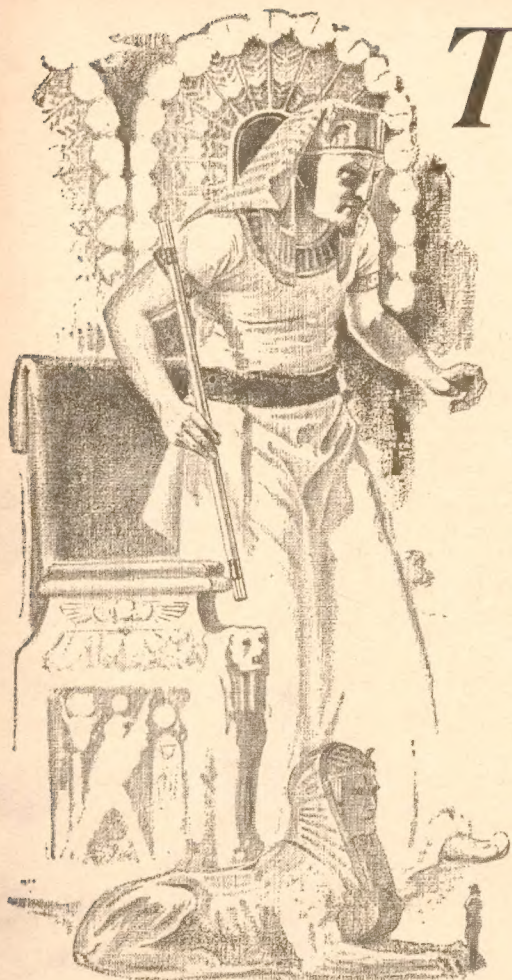
I'm no "fireplace and magazine" adventurer! Neither are my buddies. For fifteen years, and from Sunda Strait to Skagerrak, I've met and lived the adventures other people read about. I've walked from Rotterdam to Marseilles, been shipwrecked on the Siam Coast, prospected for gold in Honduras, run blockade to England, and watched at first hand the recent fall of France. I've sailed and soldiered, loved and starved in many strange places on this globe, and still read BLUE BOOK.

The reason? Well, the stories in BLUE BOOK are the only adventure yarns, in magazine format, which do not insult my intelligence nor strain my credulity. There is about them that quality of realism, of authenticity, that makes me come back for more, instead of writing my own.

Franz Gaszmann,
Somewhere at Sea.

(Continued on inside back cover)

The Escapes



*Said the King:
"Was I not ever
tender until thy
furies drove me
to harshness?"*

MR. HOBART HONEY was the pen-name of an English author slimly popular with his contemporaries, frightfully popular with himself. He went to India to collect local color for his next book. And he got it. He got enough local color to last him the rest of his life and halfway through eternity thereafter. In a bottle.

It was while he was wandering down a side-street in Benares that he saw a kind of mad dog—either mad, half-mad or just simple—dash from an alley with the obvious intention of biting an oldish gentleman then passing down the sidewalk. With great presence of mind Mr. Honey flung his camera at the dog, who vociferously acknowledged receipt, and abandoning its vicious design, vanished around the corner, semi-concussed, complaining bitterly about the English and the angularity of their cameras.

The old gentleman proved to be a Lama from the mysterious Forbidden City of Lhasa in Tibet. In Lhasa there are many Lamas—and they are all supercharged with a wisdom so profound that it looks like magic.

Mr. Honey's Lama was a mild-mannered, benign old gentleman, a little absent-minded, and he was extremely grateful for Mr. Honey's intervention. He *could* have struck the dog stone dead by will-power alone—but he never thought of that till long after the dog was fatally scratched by a mad cat up an alley. He warmly expressed his thanks, and after an interesting conversation, he went his way. Mr. Honey, completely unaware that he had established a claim upon the gratitude of probably one of the most potent Lamas of modern times, returned to his hotel. That evening a parcel was handed in at the hotel addressed to Mr. Honey. It contained

a longish letter from the Lama and a curiously shaped bottle of emerald-green and amethyst-blue Chinese glass.* This bottle contained a large number of ordinary-looking pills. But they were far indeed from ordinary—as will be gathered from a perusal of a letter the Lama sent with them.

Painstakingly translated by an interpreter, the letter ran much as follows:

"Inasmuch as thou hast saved me from the Power of the Dog, my son, thou hast established forever upon my gratitude a claim never to be forgotten.

"Thou hast said that thou art a common scribe, an ordinary deviser of tales with which to entertain the populace in many lands.

"Truly, it meseemeth that thou art over young and but imperfectly equipped for so great a task, for how can thy wandering mind and youthful imagination faithfully portray those things thine eyes have not truly seen, those peoples whose speech thou hast never heard, and those places in which thou hast never dwelt? My son, I grieve for the labor that thou hast expended in vain, lacking true knowledge of the things whereof thou writest. Therefore I send unto thee the means of acquiring that knowledge which is necessary unto thee for the true perfecting of thy craft.

"Thou hast lived many lives—thou hast perambulated the face of the planet Earth in numberless incarnations. Yet thou hast no remembrance nor any knowledge of these myriad lives that thou hast lived aforetime—for remembrance and knowledge are locked away from thee and the most of mankind, so that although thou art a creature of vast experience thou canst not be, nor ever hast thou been, competent to utilize this measureless and mighty experience in the practice of thine art. Witless, therefore, must be thy works, my son, and ill-informed the boldest flights of thy fancy. It is as if an eagle should set forth to soar upwards unfurnished with wings.

"I am full of compassion for thee, my son, for thou art as an Egg which is unhatched, or as a Mustard Seed which is unsown. Yet because thou gavest of thine instant aid unto me in

*Mr. Honey, sometime later, refused an offer of £5000 from the British Museum for this bottle which was so antique as to be unique—priceless. Later—but not very much later—he accepted £5005.—*Bertram.*

of Mr. Honey

the matter of the dog, I am minded to aid thee in thine art.

"So that henceforth thy body shall accompany thy mind on its wanderings, I send unto thee the keys of a certain number of thy past incarnations: Regard the pills within the bottle that cometh with this letter. When thou art in the mood for adventure, spend first as it were an hour in reposeful meditation, then swallow but one only of the pills, and await peacefully that which will at once take place. Thou wilt return to live again for a space of time some one or another of the uncountable lives which thou hast lived before that which thou art now living.

"Be not alarmed if thou shouldst awake in the form of a wild swine of ancient days, a lizard of the rocks, or an humble ape bescratching itself on

the banyan bough, for thy days there-as will be but brief, and ere thou hast time to accommodate thyself to thy new surroundings—lo! the power of the pill shall have waned, and thou shalt find thyself again upon thy couch in these days.

"Fear not that thou wilt ever be what thou hast not once been. If in past ages thou hast been a great king, a noble lawgiver, a mighty prophet, it may be that the power of the pill will reinstate thee in thine ancient splendor; or if thou hast been before somewhat of an inferior quality, as it might even be no more than a jack-ass browsing upon the hillside, or a

"I have outgrown the fury and hysteria, Ptolemy," she cooed.



A 1942 author takes holidays from war by strange adventures in transmigration.

"Halj, suyest thou?"
Honelius choked over
his wine. "Aye," said
Pho-ni, "fifty-fifty, as
the Romans say."



rat journeying darkly through the runs and tunnels of his dismal abode, so mayst thou be again. But what-so-be-it befalleth thee, it is certain that thy knowledge of past things shall wax enormously, and thou shalt become exceeding wise, so that thy fellow-scribes, scratching busily like fowls behind the granary, shall behold thy works with amazement!"

So much for the Lama. There was a good deal more of it, but the extract conveys the idea tolerably well.

It took Mr. Honey quite a while after his return to England to work himself up to the point of trying a pill or two. But he possessed an insatiable curiosity and an extremely good opinion of himself. It seemed to him that when he swallowed a pill he had a glorious chance of finding himself for a spell back in the days when he was King Solomon, Julius Caesar, Richard the Lionhearted or some such notable party. Certainly there seemed to be slight risk that he might wake to find himself a two-toed wild ass on a prehistoric prairie, a bat in a belfry, or a stranded jellyfish drying up on a tropical beach.

"Pity the Lama didn't label the pills," he said to himself when, comfortably before the fire in his London flat, after a good dinner, he took out a pill and studied it a little wistfully. "It would be much simpler. For example, 'King, B.C. 992,' or 'Centurion, Early Roman,' or 'Monarch, Medieval,' or 'Conqueror, A.D. 62.' Or if these clammy incarnations had to come into it, a label to each, such as 'Eel, A.D. 1811,' or 'Squid, Stone Age,' would have been very helpful. I should at least know which pills to take and which to set aside for others. Still, there it is—take it or leave it!"

He drank a glass of port, refilled, and studied the pill. Was that ordinary-looking little thing a free pass to the palaces of Cleopatra in the form of her Roman Heart's Delight Antony, or was it the *Open Sesame!* to a brief spell of existence as a weevil

in a ship's biscuit on board Lord Nelson's old *Victory*?

He might find himself the Great Mogul, T'Chaka the Zulu King, Jonah, Shakespeare, Dick Turpin, Adam, Oliver Cromwell, or just a galley slave, a baggage camel, a starving wolf, a skunk or merely a fly in a starving spider's web. He might even be Louis XIV of France discussing, as it were, affairs of state with Madame de Montespan; he might be Sir Francis Drake soaking the Spanish Armada; or William the Conqueror, Hercules or Columbus; Lancelot befriending the lovely Queen Guinevere, or any other one of those highly experienced heroes of romance.

But at this stage, realizing sharply the wealth of pure—or fairly pure—local color awaiting him, he swallowed the pill suddenly, washed it down with a glass of wine and instantly wished he had not done it. It occurred to him that he might after all have been one of the slightly inferior ones—might wake up as a Sixth Century bullfrog baying the moon, or wooing a cow-frog in a Sixth Century Louisiana swamp.

He tried to rise, with the intention of hurrying to the nearest doctor, but he was considerably too late.

A sudden dizzy faintness seized him, gluing him to his chair—and it was growing dark. He heard the clock on the mantelpiece strike nine thin, far-off tinkling chimes—incredibly remote, the last stroke; then it grew very dark and still.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Mr. Honey slowly but surely. He did not hurry to open his eyes, for he felt a little queer.

"Too much of that wine last night," he thought a little muzzily. "Let me see, just what was it that happened? I think—I was—" No, he couldn't quite remember—something very far off. He felt a little bilious—the bed seemed to be swaying and rolling like a ship . . . a ship—why, it *was* a ship!

This was no bed—or if it *was* a bed, then it was on board some ship somewhere.

He was oddly unwilling to open his eyes, so he felt himself—a leg, yes, that was a leg, a human leg. He moved it. It was his own leg—good, he was human, a man! He felt thankful—but only in a dim, fading-out kind of way. No recollection of London remained with him—and only one lingering shred of the memory of Hobart Honey—dissolving from his mind like the last wisp of fog in the morning sun. He was like a man waking slowly from a pleasant dream which he could not remember.

But he could feel the heat of the sun on his face. He could feel a fly that lit on his cheek, and he could both feel and appreciate the sudden waft of air that swept the fly away.

Suddenly he knew who he was. He opened his eyes, and scowled savagely at the extraordinarily beautiful girl who stood close by his couch, waving a big featherly fan gently to and fro over his head—a handmaiden.

"Attend to thy task, fool!" he said shrilly. "Am I to be devoured of flies because thou art lost in contemplation of some ruffian sailor's tarry knees?"

The girl went white with fear.

He sat up. "Wine," he said sourly. She signed to another handmaiden standing close by, apparently for the express purpose of waiting upon him, for she hurried away across the deck of the ship upon which the late Mr. Hobart Honey of London had awakened.

And now he was thoroughly awake—as he needed to be, for the Lama's pill had landed him in a period of the world's history when only wideawake men could hope to get on. The times were rough—naturally enough, for there were a lot of rough people actively engaged in raising roughness to what they evidently regarded as a fine art.

It was, indeed, round about the year 303 B. C., some years after the death of Alexander the Great, when

that hard-boiled aggressor Prince Demetrius, son of Antigonos, had saved Athens from Cassander, whom he utterly defeated. Having no other war on hand for the time being, the Prince had returned to Athens, where he had been giving himself a very hearty welcome indeed—the said hearty welcome consisting of a period of highly riotous living at the expense of the general public, which had not yet realized that Demetrius had saved Athens for himself, not for them. . . .

Mr. Hobart Honey was now Honelius the Eunuch; and until a few hours before, he had been none other than Grand Eunuch—so to express it—to the great Demetrius himself: a post, in those days, of extraordinary importance and profit.

Honelius was probably the most successful eunuch of the times—and certainly he was the most crooked. Judged by modern standards, a ball of string was straighter. Even in those far-distant and unfastidious days, he was regarded as no gentleman.

Apprenticed to the craft of eunuch at an early age, he had started life in a smallish way in Alexandria, and had slowly worked his serpentine way up in the world until he had been appointed assistant-eunuch in the harem of Demetrius. Many years of success having rendered the kindly old Grand Eunuch, Jorj, careless, Honelius did not find it difficult speedily to direct a fatality toward his chief—into whose sandals he stepped forthwith. For a time he had prospered. He possessed a good deal of low cunning, which Demetrius had once or twice found as useful as some daring beauty on the Prince's matrimonial card-index had found it fatal.

But Demetrius, a man of action himself, never had much admiration for his Grand Eunuch, or for that matter, any of the staff of Honelius. As a type, they did not interest the Prince. This, of course, Honelius knew—and the experienced ruffian did not find it difficult to apply to himself the old proverbs which direct us to make hay while the sun shines, and to paddle our own canoes.

Shortly after Prince Demetrius returned to Athens from the pursuit of the unfortunate Cassander, there arose upon the domestic horizon of the Prince a new star. She was called Lamia, and it is recorded that she was so devastatingly beautiful that Demetrius fell off his horse at his first glance at her. For her own part, although she admitted that she was no more—nor less—than a simple country girl who had never before been in a big city, she kept her head extraordinarily well, and within forty-eight hours she was figuring on Card One of the Index of Wives.

This meant that the figures of all the other cards had to be altered—no

light task. It was a small joke made by Honelius to the staff of eunuchs as they sat late at night altering the card numbers which made Lamia his enemy for life. It was merely some reasonable wisecrack about ordering-in an adding-machine for the clerical staff if Demetrius conquered many more countries; but Lamia disliked the implication that she could ever be Number Two on the Index.

Honelius had very speedily been informed (by one of his junior eunuchs) of his rocky position in Lamia's good graces. He checked the lad's story with his usual care.

"Thou sayest she said I was a bald-headed grafter and a snuffy old snake-charmer, hey, boy?"

"Yes sir."

"Because of that little jest of mine about the cards?"

"Yes sir."

"Where was this?"

"In her bedroom, sir, this evening."

"To whom was she speaking?"

"The Prince, sir."

"Oh, is that so? What answered her?"

"He laughed, sir—he was in a gentle mood—and said probably she was right. He said he would have a word with thee, sir."

Honelius had turned pale.

"Did he so? And what wast *thou* doing in her bedroom?"

"Gilding her feet, sir."

"Why *thou*? Doing a lady's maid's work like that!"

"The Prince asked that question too, sir, and the Lady Lamia said she liked me," said the young eunuch.

"She liked *thee*! Had she been drinking?"

"Yes sir."

"Oh, I see. Didst thou hear anything else?"

THE young eunuch came closer, looking much more serious.

"Yes sir," he whispered. "She complained about the quality of the gilding on her feet and the vermilion on her nails, and the Prince promised her two hundred and fifty talents* for her to buy cosmetics. The city he had saved would provide it gladly, he said unto her."

The Grand Eunuch staggered. "*How much?*" he murmured faintly.

"Two hundred and fifty talents, sir."

"Great Zeus! The Athenians won't stand it. No, boy—they will suffer it not!"

"No sir."

"All right—thou canst quit the department!"

"Thank you, sir."

The junior eunuch quit.

*Some two hundred and fifty thousand crowns. Demetrius was anything but a small-change juggler.—*Bertram*.

For some minutes Honelius had sat holding his head in his hands. The outlook was bad—nay, grim.

This girl Lamia was too fast a worker for him. That was glaring—a graven image with its jeweled eyes removed, could have been seen that at the bottom of a coal-mine on a moonless midnight. Here, in five seconds, she had practically wiped him, Honelius, the Grand Eunuch, famous throughout Asia, Africa and probably the rest of the world, off the map and picked

good turn that a young seafaring captain can appreciate. Then he went quickly to his business office at the entry to the seraglio of the Prince. He had much to do and very little time to do it in—but he did it.

EIGHT hours later there sailed from Greece a large caique bearing such a cargo of sheer charm and beauty as probably few ships have ever borne since that day.

Honelius, in his way, could be a fast worker too. Within that limited time, working in fear of his life, he had carried out one of the biggest embezzlements of the dangerous times in which he lived. He had embezzled from the seraglio of Prince Demetrius no fewer than sixty-two wives—viz., as per Bill of Lading:

*Seventeen Circassians (rich blondes).
Twenty-two Georgians (curved ones).
Eleven Turkish (brunettes).
One dozen various.*

matrimonial circumstances, in love with romance for romance's sake, and a little thrilled with the idea of marrying into the establishment of a monarch beside whom even the great Demetrius was a small-town hero, the sixty-two leaped gratefully at the opportunity.

It was, as the saying goes, the work of only a moment to falsify the card index. Probably months would elapse before the audit of the matrimonies of Demetrius was made. So, two hours before the sun rose over Athens, Honelius and his plunder were well out to sea, heading before a fair wind to Alexandria and—he believed—fortune, happiness and the favor of Ptolemy forever.

It was dishonest even then—303 B. C.; it must always be dishonest to embezzle sixty-two of a man's wives. The fact that Demetrius was heavily overstocked with wives made no difference; nor did the truth that the Prince had fallen out of love with the few of them with whom he was acquainted. And the fact that Honelius had about as much personal interest in the ladies as the ladies had in him did nothing to mitigate this felony. It was just plain stealing, plus falsification of the books.

The standard of charm and beauty among the big bevy aboard the caique was naturally high; Honelius, a good picker, judged it to average around ninety-five per cent of perfection; but even so there was one who outshone them all. This was Icyllene, an oddly named girl who was neither icy nor



up a quarter of a million crowns for her toilet-table!

She was not safe. Even the brigands of the hills said: "Your money or your life!"

This simple country girl said: "Your money and your life!"

Honelius thought rapidly. He must go—yes, he must be getting along. This was no place for a decent, quiet, respectable eunuch. He was not going to be allowed to live—and even if he was allowed to live, there was going to be nothing to live on.

He hit a gong, and sent a junior for a young seafaring captain to whom he had more than once done the sort of

They too had heard of Lamia, and were glad to go. Very few of them had ever seen Demetrius or ever expected to. Honelius played fairly fair with them. He told them frankly he was on his way to Alexandria, where he expected to be able to arrange for their marriage to no less a person than Ptolemy, the King of Egypt.

Fond of travel, not averse to adventure, bored with their present

lean. Her origin was completely unknown to Honelius—she always said she had forgotten it. It had been said of her once that she too was a simple country girl from the other side of the sea. There had been a period when Demetrius had adored her, but she had fallen out of favor—mainly, Honelius had learned, because of her temper. But whatever her temper (which Honelius had found to be no

worse than that of an ordinary infuriated tigress), she was a goodly sight—a tall, burning, golden peach-blond, with great slumbrous eyes as nearly the color of violets as eyes can ever be, a figure of such symmetry that Demetrius fell off his horse when he first noticed it, and he was a judge of figures; a smile (when she wished) that would lure young men from the buffet, old men from the counting-house or children from their toys. In a good temper, she was irresistible; in a bad temper, she was like uninsulated electricity.

Honelius did not like her much, nor did he dislike her. He merely graded her as the girl who was the most likely of all his cargo to rank as Morganatic Wife No. 1 to King Ptolemy if she kept a level head.

"And take thou heed of this, my girl," he said, interviewing her the day before they reached Alexandria; "a girl in that position can go far in these days. The times are unsettled—the successors of Alexander the Great grab out in all directions for what they can get, and my personal forecast of the winner is Ptolemy. A girl who, so to put it, makes the grade with Ptolemy, and has the cleverness to make me her personal vizier, will show the world something the world has not yet seen, in the technique of building up a few old-age comforts. Egypt is the country of the future, Icyllene, and thou mightest as well scheme it into thine own pretty little claws, as watch someone else scheme it into theirs. Dost thou understand—or art thou daft? Eh?"

She smiled rather oddly, without speaking, and strolled away.

The eunuch watched her as she went. "Now, why did she smile like that?" he thought, shrugged, and sent for another jar of wine. . . .

The voyage was as uneventful as one could reasonably expect of the voyage of a ship with sixty-two stolen wives, all beautiful, on board, not to mention the handmaidens. No pursuing craft appeared bent on recapturing the ladies. Probably Demetrius was too engrossed with Lamia to have missed any wives—or perhaps he was glad of an opportunity to economize. But even so it was with a sigh of relief that Honelius saw the ship safely anchored at Alexandria.

HE wasted no time in going ashore and calling at the Eunuchs' Club. It was early in the day, and the Club was empty. So Honelius ordered something for himself, and invited the steward to join him.

"The apartments are desolate and the courtyard lone, Steward," he said. "Hath the King departed from the city?"

"Nay, sir—the city is but asleep after the festival."

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

"Thou art a shrewd fellow, I doubt it not, Steward?" said Honelius, producing a small bag of money. "Couldst use a windfall of Greek gold?"

The steward looked respectfully surprised that such a smooth-looking eunuch as Honelius could ask such a foolish question.

"No man in this fair city could put Greek gold to better usage, sir," he replied hastily. "I have studied these matters for three score years, and I claim—"

"Answer me, then, the questions I shall ask thee, and I will set thy feet on the way to fortune," Honelius interrupted him. "Knowest thou the Grand Eunuch to the King?"

"As well as I know the way from this courtyard to the cellars and back again, sir. Why, is he not President of this club? How should I not know him?"

"Tell me of him, Steward. Dost thou esteem him to be a man of affairs, quick in the uptake?"

"He taketh all he can get—very quickly, and at all times, sir."

"Hath he a broad mind, or is he, on the contrary, a narrow-minded niggler? Doth he swallow that which he findeth by chance within his mouth, or doth he spit it foolishly forth? Is he a partnerly man—content to share good fortune fairly?"

"He is a pliant man, ready at all times and at all costs to augment that which he hath already accumulated."

"That is good, Steward. His name?"

Honelius, intent on ticking off names, failed to notice the surprise which leaped to the eyes of Pho-ni as the dazzling lady unveiled.

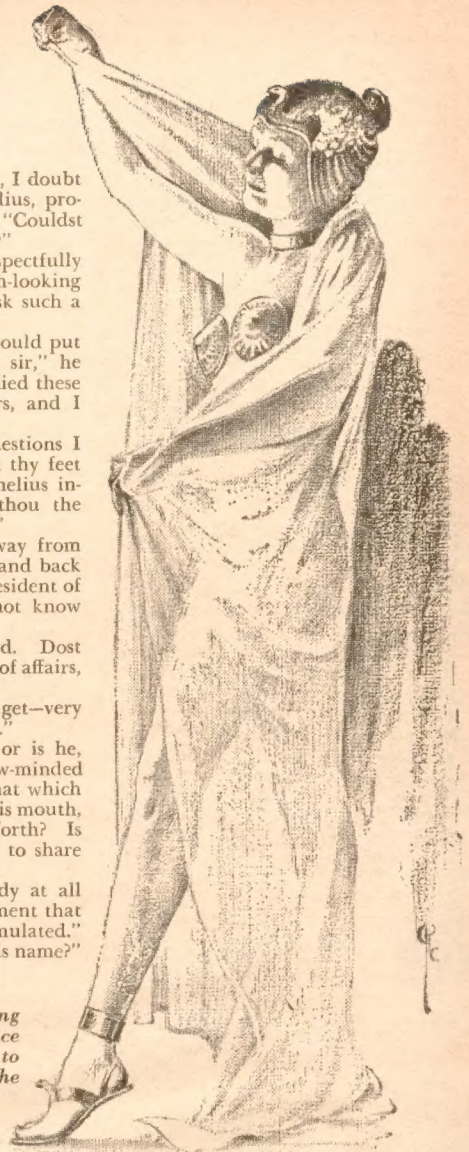
"Pho-ni—and it is said that he—" But the steward broke off suddenly as a man strolled into the courtyard.

"He cometh even now, good sir," whispered the steward. "Is it thy wish that the gold of which thou didst speak—"

"Anon, anon," said Honelius. "Fear not for the gold. Announce me. I am Honelius, Grand Eunuch to Prince Demetrius!"

The steward humbly obeyed, and the two eunuchs exchanged greetings with extreme politeness, eying each other intently.

A remote thought worried at Honelius as he took in the cold glassy



eyes, the thin cruel lips, the vulture-beak nose of Ptolemy's Grand Eunuch, Pho-ni.

"He is no Egyptian, and I have seen him aforetime," said Honelius. "Nay, not this man, I think, but someone like unto him!"

But he could not remember where. "Welcome to this city, fair Honelius," said Pho-ni. "It is the hour of the first morning draught—a good omen! Steward, wine to mine own apartment! Do thou accompany me, good Honelius, to a place somewhat more comfortable than this courtyard, which already becometh sun-stricken and airless!"

A considerable time had passed and much wine had been poured before the sharp-set couple got down to strict business. But when at last they arrived at that stage, business was very strict indeed. As Pho-ni truthfully said:

"Ptolemy has about as much need of another sixty-two morganatic wives, so to put it, as I have. He is not like his father—a real ladies' man. He's got a lot of other interests. He's fond of books—talking of founding one of these newfangled libraries, in fact.* His present Royal Wife No. 1 is Berenice, as thou knowest, Honelius; and Berenice is a woman of character. She frowneth upon the morganatic ideal!"

"It is then fortunate for our brotherhood that the morganatic idea has established itself so firmly in the affections of the people and the customs of the kings," said Honelius.

"Sixty-two is a goodly bevy," demurred Pho-ni, who was a good business man.

"Bah! Is Ptolemy the King of Egypt, or is he an Arab chieftain in a small way? Hath he—hath *she*—hast thou *no* regard whatsoever for his glory?" Honelius shook his bald head reprovingly. "How many wives hath he now?"

Pho-ni took out his wax memorandum tablet and totted up a few figures.

"Roughly, six hundred and ninety! That is not to count the numerous diggers of gold who are hopefully on their ways hither from all parts of the Empire."

HONELIUS raised his fat hands in horror.

"Six hundred and ninety! Nay, thou dost but jest! Ptolemy Soter the First, Splendor of the East, Total Eclipsor of the West, hath but a meager six-ninety wives to mirror his glory to an awe-struck world! Not even the level fifty score! Tell me, is he a *mean* man—is he niggard of his treasury? I have not heard so. Six-ninety Mirrors of Glory—for look you, Pho-ni, what shall a man discover the better to mirror his glory than his wife! Thou knowest—as I know—that the poorest of men is judged by the quality of his wife. If she be of good quality, doth not the world envy and admire him? How much more so, then, a large quantity of good quality? That telleth a tale—that broadcasteth a goodly line of advertisement! But these be but the elementals of our craft, Pho-ni. Thou knowest! Yet am I taken totally aback, yea, am I bestaggered, at this

meagerness. Meseemeth that I am indeed arrived in an auspicious hour. There is no far corner of the outer world whereat King Ptolemy is rated at fewer than a thousand wives—not to mention handmaidens!"

"I know, I know," said Pho-ni, impatiently. "Have I not said that His Majesty is preoccupied with the Royal Library?"

"That too is good, and a sign of greatness. But I maintain unto thee, Pho-ni, that it is less good that he should sink into obscurity with the reputation of being the first known king who stinted himself of a wife or two! Gods! Were such an one as Prince Demetrius King of Egypt, I would warrant that a full assembly of his Mirrors of Glory would outdazzle the very sun! Hesitate not, nor linger longer, Pho-ni! Hasten unto the King forthwith with tidings of my caïqueful! Advise—"

"Nay, there is no need. Have I not had authority these many years to negotiate marriages to any extent on behalf of my royal master? Aye, good Honelius, and authority also to debate the marriage settlements with the trustees of the ladies! Art thou trustee for thy bevy, each one of them?"

"Aye, that am I! And because I like thee well, good Pho-ni, because thou art a man after mine own heart, I am not disposed to be harsh, grasping or avaricious in the matter of the marriage settlement."

They sent for another large libation** of wine and settled down to business.

"For example, fair Honelius, what might be *thy* notion of an equitable—a fair and reasonable—marriage settlement per lady?"

"A fair question, Pho-ni," said the trustee of the bevy. "And I will answer thee fairly. An hundred talents for each Mirror of Glory, as to sixty-one of the noble, beautiful creatures! But as to the sixty-second, the peerless Icylene—a settlement of two hundred talents will only just save the situation. Less would be to insult the loveliest lady that ever set foot on the shores of Egypt!"

Pho-ni's face went all wrung-up.

"Gods! Thou art a man with the mouth of a leviathan! Dost realize that the sum total of these settlements addeth up to six million, two hundred thousand crowns! Why, His Majesty could build a Pyramid for less money! What art thou, Honelius—a human being, or a plague of locusts? Nay—nay—nay! If we are to talk, in the name of Cheops let us talk as the sane talk."

"Even so, Pho-ni! I but do my duty as trustee for these fair maids. If the figure I have mentioned gratheth upon thine ears, make me an offer!"

"Nay, Honelius, for I have no knowledge of astronomical figures."

There was something so firm and definite about the Egyptian's refusal that Honelius weakened a little.

"Doubtless thou knowest the present condition of His Majesty's Treasury better than I. If he prefers to spend his money on books instead of the augmentation of his fame and splendor—but nay, I find that fantastic beyond belief. Pay me but fifty talents per head for the sixty-one, and an hundred talents for the unique Icylene."

"I will *not* do so, Honelius! I value my position, and I am not desirous to be cast forth into the desert—to the hyenas."

"There would be an honorarium for thee equal to ten per cent of the marriage settlements," rasped Honelius.

PHO-NI nodded firmly.

"I deal not in vulgar fractions, Honelius. One tenth, sayest thou? I am a fair and a reasonable man. I will take no more nor less than is my fair due—I will give no man more nor less than his fair due. It is just conceivable to the human mind that my royal master might be persuaded to go so far as twenty talents per marriage settlement, per head. And of these twenty talents, thou shalt throw back unto me ten talents per lady."

"Half, sayest thou?" And Honelius choked over his wine.

"Aye, fifty-fifty, as the Romans say! Come now, a truce to folly. The marriage settlements shall be twenty talents per head, Icylene's included—one-half to be paid into my hand, one half unto thee. What more just and reasonable?"

"I must even agree. Thou art a hard man, Pho-ni."

"Nay, but thou comest to Alexandria at an unpropitious hour. The treasury is a little low."

"I am not amazed that it is low, Pho-ni!" said Honelius sarcastically.

"Be not downcast, good Honelius. Thy share of the settlements will amount to six hundred and twenty talents, and the rate of exchange works out at a shade over a thousand crowns to the talent. At that, thou wilt require a cart to get thy money to the ship. Another libation? Nay? So be it. I will now view the ladies."

They strolled down to the harbor and the caïqueful of beauty.

The last of the ladies to meet Pho-ni was Icylene. Honelius, his mind intent on the wax tablets on which he was ticking off names, failed to notice the sheer surprise which leaped to the eyes of Pho-ni as the dazzling lady unveiled. Nor did he notice Ptolemy's Grand Eunuch press his finger to his lips as he faced her.

*The famous library of Alexandria was in fact founded by Ptolemy Soter. Where he got the books from it is difficult to say, so the less said, the better.—*Bertram*.

**An Egyptian libation of those days was about equal to what we moderns call a load.—*Bertram*.

When Honelius looked up, Icyllene had already re-veiled.

"Superb! Indeed, thou wert no more than fair in thy description of her loveliness—or of any of them, Honelius. Bid them prepare to meet their royal husband, and let us hasten to the palace."

Ptolemy may have had a passion for books, but in spite of Pho-ni's observations, he was not prone to neglect an opportunity of acquiring yet more Mirrors of Glory.

It was only a few hours after the matter of the marriage settlements had been arranged that he had interviewed each lady but Icyllene, and in each case approved the wisdom of Pho-ni.

Icyllene, naturally enough, it seemed to Honelius, was the last to be introduced to the King—"the last and the best," murmured Honelius, appreciating the craft of the Egyptian eunuch. Honelius knew that once Ptolemy had recovered from the pleasant shock which the beauty of Icyllene inevitably would give him, nothing remained for Pho-ni to do but to get the order on the royal treasury signed and collect on the same. That seemed to Honelius to be true tact and diplomacy. He had already arranged about the cart to carry his share back to the ship.

The King was in great good humor as Icyllene, fully veiled, glided up to the throne between the two kneeling eunuchs, faced the smiling King, and in one movement unveiled.

THE King looked. Then his face changed.

He leaped to his feet with a shout. "Thou! Thou! Nekhet! Thou wilt cast again! How daredst thou return unto Egypt! Gave we not fifty talents to our friend Prince Demetrius to take thy fatal beauty and thy cobra temper off our royal hands but two years gone? How camest thou hither?"

He glared at Icyllene, who glared back. He shifted his glare to Honelius and Pho-ni.

It was Pho-ni who spoke. "Splendor of the World," he said, "it was this villain calling himself Honelius who conveyed her hither. He announced that he brought the brightest Mirror of Glory in the whole planet Earth—so fair, so dazzling, so all-but-unbearably beautiful that he would not by any means permit her to unveil. 'None but the royal eyes of the Light of Egypt shall see her first unveil,' said he. Nor could all mine art dissuade him."

The King clapped his hands in a peculiar manner, and a couple of black eunuchs, each about seven feet tall, strode into the hall. They were heavily armed.

Honelius knew why this lethal-looking couple had been sent for. He knew, too, that if these were not

enough to deal with him, there were plenty more like them not far away.

Pho-ni had—for no reason known to him unless it was that he meant taking all the marriage-settlement money for himself—condemned him to certain death. Dimly he remembered, as he groveled, hearing that some years before, Ptolemy, exasperated at the impossible temper of a completely untamable beauty called Nekhet, had presented her to a royal friend with his compliments and a huge present. But who would have dreamed that Nekhet was Icyllene?

"Slay him!" ordered the King, and glared at Icyllene as if he would shortly order a similar hasty dispatch for her.

But Icyllene smiled contemptuously. "Thinkest thou to order me also to be slain?" she asked. "Thou hast forgotten the warning of thine astrologers, O Ptolemy!" she said icily.

The King started like a man who has remembered something worth starting about.

The lovely liquid voice of Icyllene rose on the silence.

"Thou hast forgotten, Ptolemy—thou wert ever forgetful. But I forget not. Harken unto me—these were the words of the astrologers as they read them from the stars so clearly that it was as if they were written in letters of light across the whole arch of the firmament: 'Set this woman aside, Great Ptolemy, as thou desirest it; but slay her not, for it is written that when she has been dead in Egypt one day, then thou diest also! For thy span is one day longer than her span—and no longer!'"

She laughed. "Rememberest thou not?"

"I remember."

"Slay *me* also, then," she challenged.

"Not so," said Ptolemy very quickly.

He used only the best astrologers, he paid them well, and as was the custom of those days, believed all they said.



In spite of this terrific experience, Mr. Honey tries it again, of course. The story of his next transmigration will appear in our forthcoming May issue.

"Nay? Send me again from thee, then, with gold for a gift to make me acceptable—as thou didst heretofore!"

Her voice was music.

The King fidgeted. "It was thy temper—thou wert too terrible in thy fiend-furies, Nekhet. Was I not ever tender unto thee until thy furies and hysterias and ingratitude drove me to harshness?"

"I have outgrown the period of fury and hysteria, Ptolemy!" she cooed.

The King stared, and stepped down from his throne.

"Sayest thou so, Nekhet—sayest thou so?" he murmured.

She was moving nearer to him.

"If that were so . . . Nekhet, thine image hath lingered in loveliness within my heart for these two years—and—"

He seemed suddenly to realize that they were not alone, and made a swift gesture. . . . They *were* alone instantly—rather quicker than that, for the big black guards hauled Honelius along the marble floor at such a speed that the King was decidedly painful.

OUTSIDE, Pho-ni halted them. "Honelius," he said, "I have waited long for this day. Dost thou remember one Jorj, a fat, not unkindly old man who was once Grand Eunuch to the Prince Demetrius? A man whom thou hadst slain by stealth, that thou mightest succeed him? Yea, I see that thou dost. That old man was kinsman to me—close kin, Honelius, thou slayer!"

Honelius stared at the glassy eyes, the thin cruel lips, the vulture-beak nose of the Egyptian eunuch, and knew it would be waste of breath to answer.

"Take him away and slay him!" said Pho-ni. "It was the order of the King. Be swift!"

Honelius felt the heavy hand of one of the guards drop on his shoulder. . . .

And it was quite a few seconds before Mr. Hobart Honey realized that the weight on his shoulder was not that of a giant eunuch's hand in Ptolemy Soter's palace, but merely that of his black cat Peter, who often sprang to his shoulder from the arm of his chair.

But Mr. Honey was in no mood for cats just then, and Peter was dropped to the floor with a certain abruptness. Mr. Honey stared at the Lama's bottle of pills with extreme distaste for some moments, and then reached for the decanter.

"Well, if that's the sort of man I was in 303 B. C.," he said sourly, "I can only say that I'm pretty damn glad it's the Twentieth Century! I knew they were tough in those days—but not all that tough. Either I've improved on myself a good deal since then, or the Lama got his pills mixed. Must try another sometime—but not tonight—no, somehow not tonight!"



"America holds out the hand of friendliness, offering you gold and a pension."

COLONEL EUSTACE, M.I. D.S.O., was very explicit.

"You've been assigned to British Intelligence for this mission," he said bluntly to Wyatt, "because our agents in Istanbul are known to the Nazis and the Turkish police. Your naïve appearance and excellent cover as a member of the American lend-lease administration should make you of value to Ainslee."

Jason Wyatt looked off the terrace of Shepherd's Hotel at the motley coloring of humanity that crowded the Shari Kamil. It took a mental effort to realize that this was Cairo, and that he was *en route* to Turkey on a job for the American Diplomatic Secret Service. So much had happened. War with Japan, war with Germany and Italy. And his and Tellegan's mad rush by plane from Miami to Cairo, *via* Freetown, Africa. He felt so new at this game of secret war.

Suddenly he longed for Tellegan's presence, but Tellegan was down with a fever contracted in Brazza. He was, he realized, strictly on his own. He forced a smile, turned his gray eyes to Eustace.

"I understand, sir, I'm to take your orders. You realize, however, that I'm new—a rank amateur."

Eustace finished his double Scotch and soda.

"That's quite all right. You're to do what Ainslee tells you. Good man, Ainslee. Top-hole. He'll teach you many a trick—the tricks you Americans must know if we're to keep the peace after it's won." He looked at his strap-watch. "Your plane leaves Heliopolis in an hour. Best be going."

"But—but," cried Wyatt, honestly bewildered, "am I not to know what I'm to do? What is back of this—er—Turkish intrigue?"

The Colonel smiled tolerantly.

"Look, old man: the first rule in this business is to obey orders and carry out your mission. Supply your pieces to the mosaic and leave the main picture to the brass hats. What you're to know, Ainslee will tell you. Cheerio and good luck!"

After packing at the Continental-Savoy Hotel, Wyatt had no time to go to the hospital to see Tellegan but he telephoned and was fortunate enough to catch the head of the Diplomatic

Secret Service in a lucid moment between fever bouts.

"You'll just have to go it blind, Jason," Tellegan said weakly. "You'll get priceless experience."

"But how can a man act intelligently without knowing why he does something?" Wyatt growled.

"The English do it differently from us," Tellegan said, "but they're moving heaven and earth to keep Turkey neutral, or get her in the war on our side. They also want to keep the Moslem world quiescent. You can bet this involves one or the other."

WYATT thought of his reserve commission as a combat pilot.

"It would be simpler just to shoot down Japs," he muttered, "and not have soldiers sneer at you because you're not in uniform."

"Exactly," snapped Tellegan. "It's always easier to do the obvious. But you speak three Arabic dialects, and where you might kill one Jap, you may now save thousands of lives." His voice softened. "You showed in Florida that you have the courage for the hard way."

The Secret War

An American Intelligence officer plays out a hazardous hand.

by FREDERICK PAINTON



*"Neither America
nor much money
can change me.
I swear I shall
fight England."*

Wyatt smiled. "Okay, Major Jim," he said gently, "I'll go in and pitch. Hurry up and get well."

Twenty minutes later, in a British Wellington bomber—without weapons when flying to a neutral country—he took off from the Heliopolis airport. The ship, climbing to twenty thousand feet, headed north for Istanbul. . . .

No trip is so dull as an air voyage at night: A landing at the Jerusalem airport, blacked out by the war. A high climb over the Lebanon mountains. A stop at Ankara, and cold-eyed Turkish police in green uniforms. Wyatt never felt so gloomy and bewildered.

The arrival in Istanbul in late afternoon didn't cheer him, either. It was bitterly cold. A thin snow lay over the sprawling city; a leaden gray sky seemed to lean on the pencil-like spires of the minarets guarding the noble domes of the Stamboul mosques.

He landed at the Uskudar airport across the Bosphorus from Istanbul. Here, despite his diplomatic passport, the ubiquitous Turkish police examined every stitch of clothing, his very person. They stared at his 38 six-gun, but did not confiscate it.

And when, finally, he boarded one of the swift little Bosphorus ferries, flying the star and crescent, to go to Galata, there was a round-faced Turk in unpressed clothes and a derby hat jammed down on his ears, standing a few feet away, obviously trailing him. Wyatt suppressed a dismal sigh. It began to snow heavily. Near by, a Turk looked up from his newspaper.

"It says the Germans are massing on the Bulgar border," he said.

Wyatt thought: "In the old days, when Turks wore tarbooshes and the women yashmaks, this couldn't have happened." Aloud he said: "They will not march."

"They had better not," rejoined the Turk. "We are ready for the pig-dogs."

A queer sight greeted Wyatt as he registered at the Hotel Tokatljan on the Grande Rue de Pera. Enemies mingling with friends, Englishmen, carefully dressed for dinner, and a few Americans in business suits, stood near Germans with hair *en brosse*, and voluble Italians. An Englishman was accidentally bumped by a German officer in mufti.

"*Es tut mir leid*," apologized the German.

"Quite all right," said the Englishman.

Wyatt took a big breath. You had to get used to this. Elsewhere on battlefields, frozen in snow, or blazing under the tropic sun, Englishmen and Germans slaughtered each other, and Americans and Japs fought to the death. But here, in a hotel lobby, if you bumped into a German, you didn't punch him in the nose. You apologized.

As Wyatt walked to the elevator, he saw a short-legged Jap with myopic eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses walking toward him. Broad, swarthy, there was an aura of toughness about the Jap despite his European dinner jacket.

A German hailed: "*Herr Oberst Shagi, kommen Sie bitte hierher!*"

Wyatt by a supreme effort kept his face impassive. Shagi! Why, that must be the famous Colonel Hiro Shagi, the greatest Japanese diplomatic agent in the East. But what was he doing here? German spies and Italian agents, he could understand. But a Jap—He shrugged and suppressed a sigh.

"When Ainslee deigns to get in touch with me, I suppose I'll be told something," he thought.

But, apparently, no attention was paid to him. He reported next day to the American Embassy and was assigned a desk in a sumptuous room. However, no duty was given to him. In disgust he went sight-seeing, and visited the magnificent Haifa Sophia, the Blue Mosque and the vast edifice of Suleiman the Magnificent. At dusk he returned eagerly to the hotel, expecting some kind of message.

There was none.

"Damn!" he thought. "The whole city quivers with nerves—and all I

can do is exclaim over some priceless Turkish tile."

He had a drink, a bath, dressed for dinner and went into the famous Tokatlian dining-room.

He had reached one of those rich Turkish pastries and his final glass of champagne, when a low husky contralto voice said: "How delightful to see you again, Mr. Wyatt!"

Wyatt turned and saw her smiling down at him. Her straw-colored hair was parted in the center, and then braided and the braids wound around her head made a stately coronet. Her beautifully modeled face was Slavic, wide between the eyes, with high cheekbones and full coloring. Her lips were reddened, but she wore no other make-up and needed none. She

"I'm singing here, you know, in Istanbul," she said presently. "At a place they call the *Ruf*." Her white shoulders lifted and fell. "It is not the best, and heaven knows, Istanbul has no decent night places. But it is run by Russians of the *ancien régime*, and there I am at home. One does better than in Harbin." A pause.

waiting cab. He was certain now that this was a trap, yet refused to withdraw.

She offered no explanation of Shagi, and the ride proceeded in a protracted silence. A fluttering red neon sign proclaimed the *Ruf*, and a doorman in a Don Cossack garb opened the door. But she did not go into the night-club entrance. There was a side door leading upstairs.

"They are generous enough," she said ironically, "to supply sleeping-quarters—with ten *live* a week salary."

In silence Wyatt followed her.

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



"He was a great magician," said the boy, "and he promised me greatness among my people."

was tall, rather large-boned for a woman, but she was slimly made. What startled him most, as he stood up, was the tremendous vitality of her. As she came closer, her even white teeth fully revealed in a smile, she was like an electric shock. He could feel his very skin crinkle to her magnetism.

Still smiling, she whispered: "Be glad to see me!"

Wyatt's heart pounded. At last! Ainslee!

He kissed her hand, pulled a chair and exclaimed how overjoyed he was to see her.

"We met in Shanghai on the Bund," she said. "For an instant I thought you had forgotten Noka Poteska."

"If I hesitated, it was because your loveliness blinded me," he said.

She smiled, pleased at his extravagant phrase. She joined him in a coffee and liqueur, and they made loud reference to people neither of them knew. Wyatt saw curious eyes—waiter, *sommelier*, *maitre d'hotel*, guests—upon them. He thrilled to the sense of peril.

Then: "You will come and hear me—tonight?"

Wyatt eagerly assented. Very deliberately she made him kill twenty minutes. Then she rose, and he escorted her to the lobby—certainly the most stunning woman in the place. Wyatt excused himself to get his coat and hat. When he returned, he had a shock. Her mink scarf was being placed around her shoulders by Colonel Hiro Shagi. What did this mean? Was she a decoy for a trap? But if so, why? Troubled inwardly, he went to her.

She gave him her brightest smile. "Herr Oberst," she said in flawless German, "this is my old friend, Jason Wyatt. Oberst Hiro Shagi, whom I knew in Harbin."

Wyatt was self-conscious, but the Japanese agent smiled and hissed: "So pleased! I am myself a graduate of Yale. It is to be desolated that our countries are at war. But here there is no war, and gentlemen may meet."

Wyatt muttered something, and was delighted when finally Noka Poteska took his arm and they went out to a

The room she led him into was large, rather barren and heated only by a charcoal brazier glowing on a hearth of Turkish tile. Wyatt could see his breath—and he shivered.

Then he gave a start. As the door rather loudly slammed, a man came through some hideous purple hangings. He had ragged clothes, a ragged beard, and he went straight to Noka.

"Darling," she whispered, "I did it!"

Her bare white arm went around his neck. They kissed. In that instant Wyatt knew one thing: Noka Poteska passionately and fully loved this ragged stranger.

And the man responded. He had actually gone pale.

"Thank the Lord!" he muttered in English. "It was a risk." He turned to Wyatt. "I'm Ainslee, M.I. Five. Eustace sent word. I'm glad to have you." He held out a muscular hand, cold as ice.

Wyatt, who had reached for his gun, changed the gesture to take Ainslee's hand.

"Do you always keep appointments in this Edgar Wallace fashion?" he grinned.

"Hardly," chuckled Ainslee. "But I'm in a bit of a spot. I'll explain later." He nodded to Noka. "We'll go into your bedroom, darling. Give us warning."

She smiled at him. Wyatt followed into the bedroom, which was even colder.

"Hellish climate!" Ainslee said. "But that's your luck."

WYATT felt compelled to say: "Noka was talking to Hiro Shagi, the Japanese agent."

Ainslee merely smiled.

"She's an *agent double*," he said. "She works for Shagi and Schlieffen. Bless her, it was her tip that put me onto their game."

"Ah!" said Wyatt. "Then there is a method to this madness."

"Quite!" And Ainslee began to talk rapidly. The key to the defense of the Middle East, he began, was the Mosul pipeline from Iraq to Jaffa. It brought the oil that kept the British fleet in command of the Mediterranean; it supplied the petrol for the big tank-air offensive that had beaten Rommel from the Egyptian border back to Tripoli. Upon the pipeline depended the mechanized army of a million Britons in Syria and Iraq which must stop the Germans in case they invaded and conquered Turkey and tried to drive to Suez and the Persian Gulf.

"Five hundred miles of oil pipeline," he said decisively. "It's guarded, of course, at booster stations and elsewhere, but only sufficiently to stop sabotage. If the desert Arabs took it into their heads to revolt—well, it would be a damned bad show."

Wyatt, intently interested, nodded. "So far, the Arabs have stayed indifferent. They despise the Etyies, and they hate the Germans. But they also dislike us. If they thought the Germans might win, and could be aroused to a religious frenzy—well, a million men strung out would be needed to guard the five-hundred-mile lifeline."

"Ah!" Wyatt said. "And the Germans have discovered that weak link." "Precisely!"

Ainslee paced the room in deliberate fashion. He was tall, and without the straggly beard, might even have been handsome.

He began now explaining the history of the *khalifate*. Wyatt knew the Caliph of Islam was, in practice, Pope of the Moslem world, but he listened just the same.

"The Sultan of Turkey was hereditary Caliph, presumably descended from Mohanmed himself," Ainslee said. "Britain deposed him in 1914 when Turkey sided with Germany.

After the war it was thought dangerous to vest so much power in one man's hands. For a Caliph could declare a *jehad*, a holy war—raise the green banner and shout, '*Thib hahum bism er Rassoul*'—kill in the name of the Prophet."

Wyatt took an incredulous breath. "And the Germans have a way of reviving the Caliphate?"

"They think they have. Perhaps it is true. They've seized upon the Holy Mufti of Aleppo. He might be able to stir the tribes to revolt. I've been assigned to stop him. You're to help me. It has to be secret and unofficial, because the Mufti is an escaped prisoner from the prison at Jerusalem."

Wyatt suddenly beamed happily. This was marvelous. This was the thing he had joined the Diplomatic Secret Corps for.

"What do I do?"

Ainslee didn't reply. He had stiffened. Now Wyatt gave a jerk of alarm.

There were voices in the next room: Noka's, and another's.

Softly, gun out, Ainslee crept to the door. Then he relaxed and grinned. Wyatt, following, saw Noka on her knees, and beside her a boy of ten or so wearing the *kafiah* and *djellab* of a desert Arab. They were moving little leaden horsemen.

The boy cried joyously: "*Wallah*, I make *ghrazzu*! I shall kill all your men."

Ainslee whispered: "It is little Hussein. He works here at the *Ruf* with a French legerdemain artist called Nostromo."

He was just turning back to give Wyatt his instructions when the outer door opened. A tall thin man with sardonic face entered. He had jet-black hair twisted above each temple to make black horns. His heavy eyebrows also slanted up. It gave a Mephistophelean cast to his face that was undoubtedly part of his stock in trade. Roughly he jerked the boy upright.

"For this disobedience you shall be punished," he growled; and then, to Noka: "The boy works hard and needs rest. Please, hereafter, do not admit him."

The door slammed after him. Ainslee shrugged. "Poor little tyke, he gets hypnotized, sat on, jumped on." He broke off. "Lock the door, Noka."

Presently he turned to Wyatt.

"Schlieffen and Shagi are trying to get Turkish permission to fly the Mufti to the desert north of Wadi Halfa. To spread the gospel of the *jehad*. We're trying to block that at Ankara. We may fail. If so, I intend to kidnap the Mufti and fly him to Jerusalem and lodge him in jail. That involves embarrassment with a very sensitive Turkish government—not to be done, save as a last resort."

Wyatt nodded, waited.

"But we must be ready. So your job tomorrow is to call on the Mufti as representative of the American lend-lease. You will offer him ten thousand quid,—fifty thousand dollars,—safe conduct to America and an annual pension of a thousand quid a year. He will probably refuse. The main thing is that you will examine the premises, the guards—remember all photographically, so we can plan accordingly."

"And join you for the snatch?"

"No," cried Ainslee sharply. "You have good cover—you're unknown as an agent. You'll keep damned well out of it, and do as you are told."

Wyatt's face got brick-red. He could not speak, he was so angry. Ainslee saw it, and added more gently: "You're new at this, Wyatt, so I'll make allowance. But please remember, we don't consider your spirit of adventure in this."

"I'll see the Mufti tomorrow,"

Wyatt managed to say.

"Splendid!" Ainslee shook hands. "I'll get in touch with you at the Tokatlian—this beard is out enough to stop them trying to knife me—at least temporarily. Noka will get you out. Cheerio!"

Ten minutes later Wyatt found himself in a snow-covered alley in back. Noka said: "John is so clever. Trust him. And remember, if they question you, I am an old friend."

She was gone, and Wyatt threaded his way to the Rue de Pera and so to the Tokatlian. He was not sure whether he liked John Ainslee, secret agent; in fact, he was sure he didn't.

When he entered his room he saw a light on, where he had left none. His baggage had been moved, his things rearranged. He thought of Ainslee's remark: "You have good cover—you're unknown."

He grinned and began to undress. "But not unsuspected," he chuckled.

THE Mufti of Aleppo lived in the Sweetwater section of old Stamboul, in a house unpainted and black with age. A servant in *egal*, *djellab* and *abba* led him sullenly into a room where an old man with huge gray beard and dark piercing eyes was propped up in bed. He wore the green turban of one who has made the sacred *hadji* to Mecca. On his pudgy hand he wore a ring holding a huge carnelian. At Wyatt he looked with acute dislike. And when Wyatt said politely, "*Salaam aleykum*," he merely waved his hand.

When Wyatt drew near the bed, he saw the Holy Man was ill, fever flush on his face, and a grayness of flesh.

"I am waiting to listen," the Mufti said.

Wyatt had rehearsed that speech, and he thought it brilliant. It gave him a chance to rise, to gesture, to

walk about, and thus as he spoke, his camera eye caught every detail.

"America holds out the hand of friendliness in offering this gold and pension," he concluded, "and Allah (upon Whom be prayers) can say that it is for the benefit of the Faithful."

The Mufti had not changed expression. Now he drank a few mouthfuls from a glass. He seemed in pain.

"Neither America, descendant of the thrice-accursed England, nor the offer of much money can change my course of action," he said. "England befouled her word and gave us not independence, but poverty and subservience to the Jews. I swear by Allah (upon Whom be peace) that I shall fight England to the end." Before Wyatt could expostulate, he added bluntly: "I am a sick man and I wish to be alone."

Wyatt bowed and wished peace on the house, and followed the servitor out. As he approached the door, it opened. Hiro Shagi entered, peering myopically in the darkness. Behind

him was a thick-necked German with hair shaved almost to his skull.

"Ahl!" said Shagi. "It seems we meet again, Mr. Wyatt."

Wyatt merely nodded, hurried out. The encounter puzzled him. If the Mufti was as ill as he looked, then the idea of flying him into the desert to stir up a *jihad* seemed impossible.

He returned to the hotel and spent three fruitful hours drawing a *precis* of the house, grounds and contours as he had been taught in military school. Then he waited for word from Ainslee. It did not come.

He turned on his small portable radio. Instantly he heard the loud, booming voice of Radio Istanbul.

"It is with regret that the Commissioner of Police reports the death of the Holy Mufti of Aleppo late this afternoon. This Holy Man who sought sanctuary among the Turkish people died after a brief illness of fever. By special authority, and with the permission of the British Embassy, the Holy Man's remains will be sent by plane to Jerusalem for burial in the sacred city. May Allah (upon Whom be prayers) have him in his keeping."

Thunderstruck, Jason Wyatt hastily switched off the radio. What in heaven's name did this mean? True, the Mufti had been ill, but he had not

seemed close to death. And if he had been murdered by Shagi and the German, Schlieffen, why had they killed their one hope for a holy war?

THE situation baffled him, but he had little time to dwell upon it. There was a sudden rapping at his door. Opening it, he was face to face with Noka Poteska. She held by the hand a shivering, pale boy—the lad Hussein. Hastily she entered.

"I have heard nothing from John," she whispered, "and something dreadful has happened." She pointed down at Hussein. "His master, he who was called Nostromo, has been killed."

Swiftly she told the facts. She had been waiting for word from Ainslee so as to come to Wyatt. Suddenly her door had opened. It was Colonel Hiro Shagi. He asked her if the boy Hussein was there. She had said no. His orders were that as soon as the boy returned—or was found—she was to tell him.

An hour later Hussein had crept to her bedroom via the fire-escape. He said someone had killed Nostromo.

"John has not come," she concluded, "so I am afraid, and I came to you."

Wyatt was frankly baffled. He could see no connection between such events as the Mufti's death, Nostromo's murder and the little Arab Hussein. But he had one idea: hide the boy and get to Nostromo's room before the police.

Noka hastily reassured him that the police had not been told.

Wyatt grinned at the boy. "Are you afraid to stay here alone?"

"I am Hussein ibn Ali of the Beni-sakhr, and I am afraid of nothing—save a silent dead man on the floor."

Wyatt placed the boy in his own bedroom, warned him to be silent and creep under the bed if anyone entered. Then he followed Noka to the door. Here he paused. "If you're seen with me," he said, "they'll—"

"That doesn't matter now," she said swiftly. "Already, I think, Shagi does not trust me."

So they descended to the Rue de Pera and took a cab to the *Ruf*. They went to her rooms first, but Ainslee was not there; nor was there a message. Noka led him to Nostromo's quarters. The room was icy cold, and at Wyatt's



feet the man lay dead. Messily so. A knife-wound had ripped his abdomen to the inverted V of his ribs. Noka gasped sobbingly once; then was quiet, her hands over her face.

There had apparently been no struggle; the body was relaxed; the face, so Satanic with its brows and plumes of hair, was sardonic, arrogant.

Wyatt shrugged helplessly. What did it mean? Some hidden urge, a hunch, had brought him here; but now he could see no connection with Shagi's scheme.

None the less he began a careful search of the room. It had begun to snow again, and in the silence, as he moved about, he could hear the beat of it against the window, the moan of the wind sweeping out of Asia.

He found nothing until he came to Nostromo's hands. Some impulse made him force open the fingers, clenched across the horrible wound. In the right hand was a scrap of crumpled paper.

Only a portion, and the writing small and in French. It was evidently part of a letter. Wyatt deciphered:

"As Ali stood by the tomb the voice of Mohammed spoke and told him to ride the desert and bid the tribes rise, for the day of deliverance was at hand. Four men of dignity heard the voice and swear to the message given, and among the tribes the legend is well known. So, if—"

That was all. Wyatt stared at it stupidly, wondering. A sudden movement by Noka Poteska brought him up sharply with jangling nerves. She was staring, her lips parted, at a door that was to the right in the far corner of the room.

Silently Wyatt brought out his gun. Noiselessly he reached the door, poised. Then, suddenly, he jerked it open.

Colonel Hiro Shagi's myopic eyes snapped wide. His saffron face, for once, expressed supreme surprise.

"Come in," said Wyatt dryly. "You must have found it cold in that passage."

The slanting eyes had slitted once more. The Japanese smiled. He came silently into the room under compulsion of Wyatt's gun.

"I heard him scratching at the door," said Noka.

The Jap gave her a steady regard. "You lied to me, Noka," he said. "You knew where the boy had gone. You've sold out to—shall we say the handsome Ainslee?"

His voice became deadly at the finish. Noka made no reply, but there was fear in her tight face. Once again Wyatt felt an angry helplessness. What was he supposed to do now?

"Why were you so anxious to find the boy?" he demanded.

Colonel Shagi shrugged.

"He was a witness." His eyes looked down at the corpse. "He could say much that must not be said."

Another silence fell. Wyatt moved restlessly. Did you turn a man over to the police? That meant his own involvement, endless red tape. Yet—

"Noka!" the voice came softly from the hall. Noka gave a gasp of joy and flew to the door. Wyatt saw Ainslee's ragged figure with a sense of indescribable relief. The British agent came into the room, his right hand in his pocket. His sharp gray eyes swept Colonel Shagi, Wyatt, then turned to the corpse on the floor. He looked up. "What are you and Noka doing here?" he asked.

Rapidly, then, Wyatt explained.

"There's some connection," he concluded, "between this Nostromo and the scheme Shagi and Schlieffen are planning. Only—I don't yet know it."

Ainslee smiled grimly.

"I can give you a guess. The Mufti of Aleppo isn't dead. But they need a body to fill that lead coffin. Nostromo should do nicely. And then the Mufti, disguised as his own servitor, could be flown out of Turkey and into the desert to carry out his plan."

"How do you know that?" Wyatt exclaimed.

"Because," said Ainslee, "our people won out at Ankara. A plane for a live Mufti was refused. But how could good Moslems refuse a plane to a dead Holy Man for burial in sacred ground? Eh, Shagi?"

The Japanese agent smiled gravely. "Allah (upon Whom be peace) will look kindly upon those who help one of His holy servants." He touched heart, lips, forehead. "I speak as one converted to the truth of the Koran."

Wyatt stared at the Jap in sudden respect. No wonder Shagi got along in Asia; he could speak as one Moslem to another.

"WELL," said Ainslee dryly, "the scheme won't work." He advanced on Shagi. "Schlieffen took the Mufti away—and a damned Turkish policeman prevented me from following. But you know where the holy gent is." He paused. Shagi said nothing. "I'm waiting for you to tell me."

Colonel Shagi laughed heartily. "You are most amusing."

"Ah!" said Ainslee. He gestured to Wyatt. "Hold him—he's a tricky dog."

Wyatt said: "You don't intend to—"

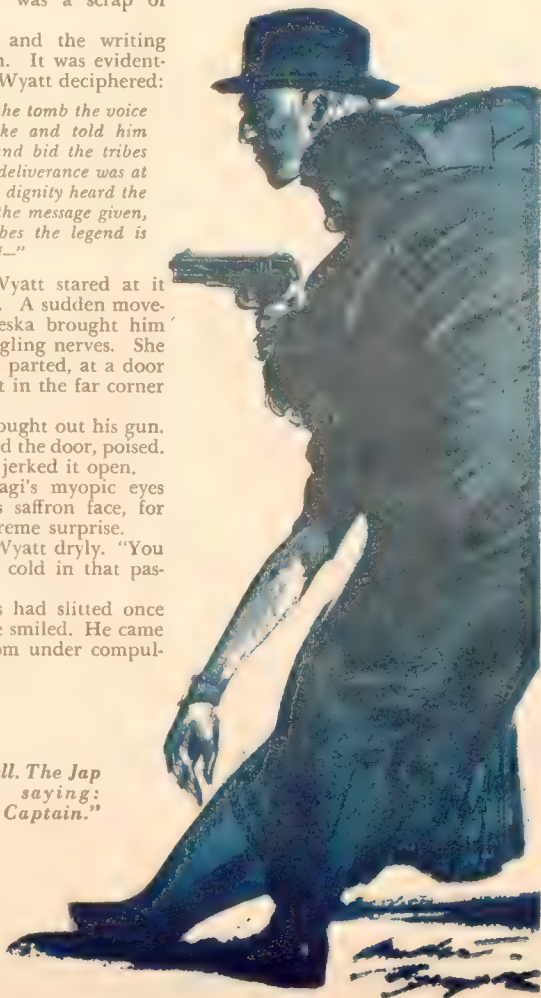
"Do as you're told," growled Ainslee. "Dear God, in this business there are no scruples! Hold him."

Wyatt unwillingly obeyed.

Swiftly Ainslee searched the Jap. He brought out cards, memoranda.

"Excellent!" He forced one of these into the dead man's stiff fingers. He took the corpse's gold watch—and forcibly pressed Shagi's fingers on it. Finally he jerked off the Japanese's coat, bent him over and daubed the secret agent's right shirt-sleeve into the blackening gore. The Jap made no attempt to resist.

"Now," said Ainslee gently, "would you care to tell me where Schlieffen has the good Mufti hidden?"



The tall girl fell. The Jap caught her, saying: "Thank you, Captain."

"If I do not tell, you will turn me over to the police as a murderer?" Shagi said softly. "With all this manufactured evidence?"

"Your arrest can be conveniently arranged."

"No doubt!" Shagi smiled. "I am sorry, Captain Ainslee, but I do not know." His eyes brightened. "So sorry." He looked past the British secret agent. "Why don't you ask Herr Schlieffen himself?"

Ainslee laughed, did not turn. "It's old, Shagi; it has whiskers—"

Wyatt looked up, made a movement. But Schlieffen, in the door, with Noka held in front of him by one arm, said: "Do not do it, Herr Wyatt."

His right hand held a big blue automatic pistol over Noka's shoulder. She was pale as flour, her eyes half-closed in terror.

Wyatt felt a movement beside him. It was Shagi moving carefully toward the door so as not to get in Schlieffen's line of fire.

"Most opportune, Herr Schlieffen," he said. "If you will just back them against the wall, I have a moment's work."

Under the automatic's threat, Wyatt and Ainslee backed up. The British agent's face was pale but impassive. He had not uttered a word. Now Wyatt saw the Jap deftly reclaim the planted evidence. Not a word was spoken for a long minute.

THEN he backed up to the door—and it was at that instant that Noka Poteska wrenched and twisted loose from Schlieffen's left arm. She raced across the room and flung herself behind Ainslee.

"They know what I've done, John," she whispered. "Don't let them please—" Her voice broke in her tight throat.

Wyatt moved his right hand slightly, saw Schlieffen's gun-muzzle turn on him.

"No, no," said the German.

Then there was no sound save Noka's fluttering gasp.

At last Colonel Shagi said quietly: "Captain Ainslee, we have no wish to kill either you or Mr. Wyatt. However, we have business with Mademoiselle Poteska. You gave me a choice a moment ago. I give you one. Make her come with me, or Herr Schlieffen will open fire."

It was incredible, insane; yet somehow Wyatt knew Schlieffen would obey. "You haven't very long," said Shagi.

Wyatt set himself for the ordeal; he made his plan to fall flat, somehow draw his gun, and try for Schlieffen.

Then Ainslee said: "Go with them, Noka."

Wyatt's jaw dropped. Instinctively his glance shifted from Schlieffen to Ainslee. The British secret agent's face was like stone.

Noka cried: "No, John, you can't mean it. You know what they will do—"

"That makes no difference," Ainslee cut her short harshly. "I can't help you when you're caught." His voice rose. "Take her, Shagi, and get to hell out."

His hand gave Noka a heavy push. She was shrinking from him, and the push sent her staggering out. Wyatt prayed she'd get in the line of fire, distract them. But she did not. Instead, Shagi darted forward. His hands moved to the back of her neck. Whatever the ju-jitsu trick, it worked. The tall girl began to fall. The Jap caught her, held her slackly like a bag of grain. Then he walked out of the room with his burden.

Schlieffen's broad face lifted in a smile of utter contempt.

"Thank you, Captain. You value your life most highly."

He backed through the door, and then suddenly slammed it. Wyatt, with an oath, drew his gun and lunged forward. Ainslee's beam-like arm caught him.

"Let him go," he ordered thickly.

Wyatt swung furiously on him.

"What the hell kind of a swine are you?" he flared. "Don't you know they'll kill her—and not easily?"

Ainslee's face was gray.

"Yes, I know it. But—but it makes no difference. We had to be free to stop this plane flight. The Mufti mustn't get to Syria."

He walked toward the door, stopped and saw the loathing in Wyatt's eyes.

"Good Lord!" Wyatt muttered.

"You love that girl—you know she tricked them because she loved you."

Ainslee's face tightened. "When you've been in this game long enough, you'll learn not to let your emotions take your eye off the main objective."

A drop of scarlet came on his lip. He licked it away.

"Come on," he said.

Dumbly Wyatt followed him down to the snow-swept street. Here Ainslee paused.

"Go to the Tokatlian and search Shagi's room. Get some things, a handkerchief—even a knife if there is one. Come back here and plant the clues. I'm going to pull wires at Ankara and through the Embassy, but that is only to stop the plane. I want Shagi in jail."

He gave Wyatt no chance to argue. He walked away, and the driving snow hid him in ten feet.

Wyatt lowered his head and strode through the pummeling flakes toward the Tokatlian. He had been badly shocked by the scene, and it set his mind to working. He reviewed every incident since he had first encountered Ainslee. And as he did so, the crazy pattern of events developed holes, inconsistencies. The chief of these was

the forcible taking of Noka Poteska. Shagi was a cool, clever and utterly fearless man. With Schlieffen, he had but one desire, to stir revolt in the desert. Such a move would be a terrible—even fatal—blow to America and Britain! Why, then, should he undertake such an irrelevant task as punishing Noka for deserting his cause?

Then there was the piece of letter in Nostromo's hands, his murder. The need for a corpse to fill an empty lead coffin might satisfy Ainslee, but it did not satisfy Wyatt.

As he was turning into the brightly lit Tokatlian, an idea leaped swiftly across his brain.

"By the Lord!" he muttered. "That's it! They've been feeding Ainslee dead herring all the time." Impulsively his stride quickened. He hastened across the lobby to the elevator. Good Lord, if he was too late! He fidgeted in the elevator to the fourth floor, and ran in long strides down the corridor. He had his gun in his hand as he unlocked the door, thrust it wide and surveyed the room before he entered. It was empty. Softly he called: "Hussein, art awake, young warrior?"

"Here is Hussein, and I am not asleep, but dream of making *ghrazzu*."

Wyatt let go a breath it seemed he had held for a century. He shut the door, hurried into the bedroom. The young Arab was on the bed, the night-lamp lit, and he smiled as Wyatt came in.

Wyatt sat on the edge of the bed.

"Speak truly," he said. "Did you see him who stabbed Nostromo?"

"No," replied the boy. "Nostromo had sent me below for a *duzyko*, a filthy drink that tastes like licorice. When I was on the stairs, I heard him cry out in pain. Someone said: 'Get the boy.'" Hussein took his eyes away. "I was afraid, and I ran out. When I came back, Nostromo was still and bloody, and I went to her of the yellow hair. And that is the truth as Allah (upon Whom be peace) will attest."

"I believe thee," said Wyatt. He was sure now that he was right. Else why had Shagi lied?

Gently, now, he asked of the young Arab's background. This was simple. Young Hussein had been sent to Cairo to study at the Moslem college, El Ashar, to study as a good *shafi'ite* who had been touched by Mahomet's holy breath.

"My father, Ali, was talked to by Mahomet," the boy said gravely. "Some say I descend from Hosain, the grandson of the Prophet."

Wyatt remembered the fragment of the letter in Nostromo's hand, and nodded. It was all quite clear now.

The boy continued: he had been taken by this man Nostromo and was shown Nostromo's magic.

"He is—was—a great magician," said the boy sincerely, "and he promised to make me master—that I would have greatness among my people. So I went with him. He taught me much, but he was cruel—and a drunkard."

WYATT marveled at the infinite patience and planning of the German—and the Jap too, for that matter—when they prepared a scheme. He could visualize the terrific shock of Hussein's return—accompanied by the Multi—doing such tricks as levitation and table-moving and like trumpery. The delicate balance of Islam could well fall if the boy spoke as he was told.

He said to Hussein: "There may be trouble soon by those who would be cruel to thee. Remain here, and quietly. Remember we are thy friends."

"I will remember," said the boy.

Carefully Wyatt closed the door. He took out his gun, switched off the light, and sat down in a deep chair, almost hidden from the door. Noka doubtless had not yet been forced to reveal where she had taken Hussein. But she would. His mouth tightened; Shagi would see to that. The ornate Swiss clock on the Turkish mantel ticked endlessly.

It was quite some time—over an hour—before there was a clicking in the keyhole and the door opened slowly, an inch at a time. Wyatt didn't move. The light-switch clicked. The room sprang into brightness. Still Wyatt did not move.

Into the room came Colonel Shagi, and with him Schlieffen and Noka Poteska. At sight of her face, Wyatt's eyes gleamed angrily, but he did not move.

"He went with Ainslee to the Turkish Ministry," Schlieffen said.

"That does not matter," Shagi turned. "They cannot stop the plane this time." He moved lithely across the room. "Bring her along. She will quiet the boy. We must have no trouble here."

They moved toward the bedroom. "How do you know the boy is still here?" Schlieffen asked. "He may have—"

"If we tricked Ainslee, surely the stupid American will not realize his value," said Shagi.

By now he was beyond Wyatt, cut off from retreat to the outside door. And then he turned slightly and saw Wyatt quietly sitting in the chair, the gun-muzzle level and unwavering.

The Jap's face turned greenish-yellow. The suck of his breath made a sharp hissing sound.

"I'm sure you're quite right, Colonel Shagi," said Wyatt, rising, "—which is why I waited for you."

A low moan came from Noka. Schlieffen emitted a yard-long German curse.

"One could wonder," said the Japanese agent, "if you blundered into it—or are brilliant."

Wyatt carefully backed them toward the tile fireplace where the charcoal brazier smoldered.

"Probably my lucky blunder," he asserted, "—only, your efforts to point all fingers at the fugitive Mufti failed, the moment you had to kill Nostromo because he threatened to blow your plan if not paid off."

"What do you intend to do?" Colonel Shagi asked.

Wyatt grinned. "To you and Herr Schlieffen—nothing. You've worked hard to build up young Hussein as a second Prophet—a new Mahdi. I've no doubt rumors have been carefully spread through all the Syrian tribes of a new Holy One."

Schlieffen's oath told that this was a good guess.

"So," resumed Wyatt, "we shall send Hussein back to the Beni-Sahki, and he will tell that the British and Amer-

icans are come to save the Faithful—and the pipeline will become something for Islam to guard instead of to destroy." He smiled mirthlessly. "We shall carry on what you have so carefully built, Colonel Shagi."

Schlieffen jerked slightly. Wyatt said: "If you make any attempt to attack, I shall shoot you in the legs and turn you over to the Turkish police as murderers. You still have Nostromo's blood on your sleeve, Colonel Shagi."

The Japanese agent smiled.

"Quite so—and a clever thought, Mr. Wyatt. Allah (upon Whom be prayers) teaches us to accept the inevitable. So we shall go."

"Just a moment," said Wyatt. "You and Schlieffen may go. Noka remains. And I wish I might obtain an accounting for what you have done to her." He gestured slightly. "Noka!"

She came toward him with a gasp.

Then it was that Hiro Shagi exploded into action.



"In the end, Mr. Wyatt," Shagi said, "one returns to bushido."

The fleeting eye-jerk Wyatt had given Noka sufficed the desperate Jap. He came across the floor, not upright, not an easy mark for Wyatt's gun. Instead, he came in the time-honored charge of a Japanese wrestler. It was lightning-quick; it was like a tackling plunge, only much more skillful. Wyatt fell with a crash. His gun roared, but the only target was the ceiling. Wyatt came blindly to one foot, one knee. There, suddenly, was Shagi, with a gun in his hand and the gun swinging upward, its steel reflecting the light in a blur. Wyatt fired, and to his eternal shame, missed. After that, things happened so swiftly that he never did sort them out.

He saw Noka leaping at the little Japanese agent to turn aside the gun muzzle. He saw the Jap swing the gun to cover her, saw the gun flash. But it was not Noka who fell. There, amazingly, was Ainslee; the bullet's impact slammed him backward against Noka, and they both went out of Wyatt's sight. For Shagi was swiveling to shoot again. This time Wyatt did not miss. . . . His face queerly twisted, the Jap fell slowly, like a tumbler taking a roll. Then Schlieffen rushed like some big tank, and Ainslee shot him from the floor.

THE sudden silence was like pain. Wyatt rubbed his face, muttered "Damn," then bent and recovered the gun that had dropped from the Jap's hand. He kicked Schlieffen's across the room. The German was hit in the shoulder and was muttering in pain. Noka was crying quietly. Ainslee, teeth showing in a grimace, was looking at Wyatt. The young American bent over Ainslee. He had a bad groove along his ribs that had just skated along the edge of his abdominal cavity.

"You'll do," said Wyatt, "but that was a fool trick—to jump a gun. If you didn't want to save her before, why play such a long shot to do it now?"

He laughed harshly, was shocked by the cracked note in it. Carefully he lifted Ainslee to the couch.

"You're a continual source of instruction in the eccentric," he repeated. "First you toss Noka to the wolves, then shove yourself between her and a bullet. One could ask why."

Ainslee said simply: "Then, I had a job to do. Saving her would have got in the way. When I listened outside to how I'd been fooled and you'd settled the matter proper, the job was done. This time my life belonged to myself, and I could do as I please. Does it make sense?"

Wyatt sat down heavily. "Yes. I suppose I'll learn if I live long enough."

"Noka understood," said Ainslee. "Didn't you?"

"I hated it, but—but—" She said no more, but leaned over and kissed his forehead. . . .

Presently a resident British doctor came and took Ainslee to the American Hospital at Roberts College. Then Wyatt called the police by telephone.

At this Hiro Shagi stirred on the floor.

"For murder?" his voice was low.

"Of course; there are still some rules left."

Shagi had a bullet through the chest, and bloody foam at his sallow lips told it had penetrated the lung.

"Please," he hissed—and coughed. "Would you accord me the courtesy of helping me to my room?"

Wonderingly, Wyatt tied Schlieffen to the heavy couch. Then he helped the Japanese agent up. The man coughed blood.

"Two doors down," Shagi whispered. "I had my room moved after you arrived."

At his own door the Japanese displayed amazing vitality.

"I can go alone now," he said. "And thank you."

He shut the door.

Wyatt called the American Embassy then, to have at least a first secretary to argue with the police. . . .

A *yuzubashi* in green and gold came, and Wyatt related enough of the truth to explain the situation, and lied unblushingly about the rest. Perhaps the *yuzubashi* understood. He grunted.

"Shagi *moralai*? Where is he?"

Wyatt led the way. Shagi's door was unlocked. As he entered, he saw Colonel Hiro Shagi kneeling in the center of the room. Somehow he had managed to don a very gorgeous ceremonial kimono—he was naked otherwise. Blood was on his lips; yet he remained steady before the picture resting on the chair before him. Wyatt closed the door on the *yuzubashi*.

Shagi turned as he heard Wyatt. His face was like pale yellow powder, and his eyes, without the glasses, looked enormous and black. Yet he could smile.

"In the end, Mr. Wyatt," he said distinctly, "one returns to *bushido*."

Wyatt stared, not moving.

"*Bushido*," repeated Shagi, "the way of the warrior. A man may put on religion as he puts on a clean suit, Mr. Wyatt, but in the end he returns to be with his own."

"The police are outside," said Wyatt.

"Please, Mr. Wyatt." The Jap's lips trembled slightly. "I am dying rather rapidly from that bullet of yours. I prefer that the end should be that of a *samurai*. I prefer to pay the penalty for failure—and the penalty of under-rating an opponent." He smiled in ghastly fashion. "We usually leave that blunder to you and the stupid

English. Could you gain me a moment—alone?"

His hand moved in the sleeve. Wyatt caught the glint of steel.

"Yes," he said, "I think so."

He went out quietly and closed the door. The *yuzubashi* looked questioningly at him. Wyatt put his finger to his lips. Waited. There came no sound from within for a few brief seconds. Then came the clipped consonants of Japanese dialect. What seemed a long time later there was the gentle thud as of a head striking the floor. Wyatt nodded quietly.

"Now you can have him," he said.

One glimpse of two hands on a gold ceremonial dagger driven to the hilt into Shagi's abdomen he caught. He did not look the second time.

HE told Ainslee about it next day at Roberts College Hospital, and Noka and the British agent stared incredulously at him.

At the conclusion Ainslee sighed. "Good God, but you're a sentimentalist. You've got to stop it, Wyatt. You've got to learn to take off kid gloves in this game. Be brutal, ruthless. You're clever, penetrating—my face is still red from my blundering. But you won't last long, playing knight errant."

Wyatt looked dreamily out of the window at Istanbul, bathed white and lovely in her mantle of snow.

Noka said: "The Japs are treacherous. What is your American slogan—'Remember Pearl Harbor'?"

Wyatt nodded absently.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said thoughtfully; "but I was thinking of a remark once made by General Robert E. Lee when he was called upon to meet a peculiarly obnoxious spy who had important information for sale. Someone counseled General Lee to be cold and aloof and refuse to be civil to such a swine. General Lee said: 'Sir, the fact that the person you meet is not a gentleman does not mean you should cease to be one.'"

His voice ceased. Noka's glance was soft, tremulous. Ainslee swallowed. He apparently could think of nothing to say.

Wyatt rose, smiling. "I've turned young Hussein over to your Embassy. They have great plans for him. And I've got orders to report at once to Cairo. I'm leaving in an hour."

Ainslee said: "Then you won't be here for the wedding. Sorry and all that, but it can't wait. Must get Noka to England and safety—man's wife does it, y'know."

Wyatt said: "Who's being sentimental now?"

He went out with their laughter in his ears. He'd be mighty glad to see Tellegan again. There was much to learn about this secret war.

Another story by Frederick Painton will appear in an early issue.

The Necessary Rope

*A story of the great Australian Desert—now crossed
by the new Strategic Road—and the rolling guns.*

by LOUIS KAYE



IN drought time, Nevin could not have made it, for then the land was desert, dry dust and rock, unwanted in its desolation and therefore virtually unknown. But the drought had lifted, the waterholes ran full, the desert was a sea of gray-blue saltbush, and Nevin's sheep were fat

with their pickings. His sheep-dogs were plump too, and his horses' coats sleek. Even the brace of camels that hauled the canvas-covered buckboard were fat to the top of their humps.

The buckboard was storehouse and home to Nevin. It carried the food, the water-barrels, the spare gear and

packs, and a hammock that he slung under it at night so that he might sleep above the snakes. For weeks now he had been following the long trail, and not one of the things that he had been warned against had come to pass. Luck was part of this; but part of it too was his easy-going and confident



nature, an amiable optimism that did not look for trouble and that swiftly erased all the gloomy predictions that had been made back in Queensland when he had announced his intention of driving two thousand head of sheep from there across Central Australia to the Northern Territory, across the northern end of what has since become Australia's Burma Road—usually called the Strategic Road.

That is quite a trek in the best of circumstances. There was a drought when Nevin bought his two thousand sheep, which meant that the scattered blacks inland would be hungrier and more likely than usual to take the chance of assaulting a white man. But if there had not been a drought, Nevin could not have bought his sheep for a shilling a head, thus assuring himself a profit of nine hundred pounds—provided he got them safely to the Northern Territory. He trusted his luck; sure enough, the drought lifted, and the few blacks he saw had looked on the passing sheep with unspeculative eyes. The only thing Nevin had had to complain about, up to the present, was the fact that for many weeks he had had no one to talk to outside of his own black boys, whose stock of conversation was exhausted in four or five sentences. He was starved for the sight of another white man—for another face as friendly as his, for a glorious night of gab.

But now there was something else on his mind, a premonition of impending trouble.

FOR the past several days tribal smoke-signals had been curling up out of the plain ahead. Nevin had three black boys, and he had asked the best of them, Nagubi, what the smoke meant. Nagubi gave him a story to the effect that the tribes

roundabout were gathering; why, he either didn't know or wouldn't say.

Nevin rose one morning to see the dark blur of an oasis of trees on the horizon. That meant water, and he made for it. He could see the shimmer of a waterhole before long; also, he saw a big encampment of blacks—The smoke-talk had been calling them here, obviously; even as he watched, he saw another little group come from off to the side to join the main mass.

A mile from the waterhole Nevin stopped the sheep and told his boys to hold the herd there. He approached the camp at an easy lope, drew rein and sat still, rifle in his saddle-boot, and no hand on it. There were maybe a hundred and fifty blacks, all full-bloods, not a half-caste among them. None wore clothes. Every man had tribal cicatrices on chest and back, and spears and boomerangs in hand or near by.

Nevin tried his English in vain until he probed through to the circle of elders who made up the tribal council. An old man answered sulkily:

"Me savvy. What you want'm?"

"To bring my stock here for water," said Nevin. "They want drink."

The elder pointed to the women and children. "Also, they want'm drink."

"There's plenty much. Plenty for your people and my stock too."

The old man turned and talked for some time with the rest of the council. Nevin waited with commendable patience. He knew that his behavior would be considered ridiculous by some white men, who would not have paused to ask watering permission,

but simply gone right through, ignoring the blacks, if necessary making a show of rifles; such, however, was not his way. Nevin believed there was an essential reasonableness in even primitive men. He thought they were putting up this little fuss because it suited their dignity, that presently he would be told to go ahead.

But he was disabused of these tolerant notions.

"White feller take'm sheep 'nother place," the elder said at last, scowling.

Nevin was surprised; still, he held onto his good temper. "What's the idea?" he said. "There's plenty water." Then he put on a smile. "Listen, I tell you what: You let the stock come to water, and I'll tell the Government you plenty good black feller. What call'm you?"

"Mulluna, they call'm," the elder vouchsafed, and Nevin saw that he was considering the matter of the Government. The word was usually potent to a native, for he beheld its power manifest in police patrols and jail compounds, its benevolence in the food-rations bestowed when hunting was bad and families hungered.

"Well, how about it, Mulluna?"

This time the charm was lacking.

"We no like'm Gov'ment," said the old man. "One feller belonga us take'm away by Gov'ment."

"I guess he deserved it," Nevin said, and thought things over.

Whatever it was that had happened, these people had a grudge against the Government, and thus, all whites. He doubted that they would make an open attack on him even if he told the balky old devil to get out of the



way and drove his herd to the water; but that night, he knew very well, his sheep would suffer, and there was nothing much that he and his three boys could do to prevent it. He weighed it over. He was too close to the end of his trip to want to take the chance of losing any of his precious herd; and besides that, the next watering-place couldn't be so very far ahead. So he made the common-sense decision. He would spend the night where his sheep were now, in the morning try to reason with Mulluna again, and if that failed, move on.

THEN he thought of a bribe that might work—tobacco for Mulluna in return for permission to water the sheep. He tried it, but it fell on deaf ears, for the old man looked up at him sullenly, not deigning to answer. Nevin reined around.

"All right," he said over his shoulder, "if that's the way you feel about it. But think it over. You're being a damned fool for no reason on earth."

No reason on earth? Nevin pondered that as he returned to his sheep. He put it down to the tribe's grudge against all white men, but somehow that was not altogether satisfactory. There was a mystery underneath it.

Later, the mystery increased.

The sun rolled out of a red sky that turned to amber and then to green as the stars crowded across from the east. It was the faint cold glimmer of starlight that betrayed the stir of movement off at the edge of his camp. Nevin's voice cut the silence sharply.

"You, Nagubi! What's going on there?"

He jumped to his feet and strode into the gloom. No use. Nagubi was gone; so were the other two boys, vanished into the thickening dark. Gone to sit in with the tribe for a night? That was harmless enough, but why not tell him? Or those smoke-signals—had they told the boys to cut adrift from the white man? Why?

It was suddenly very lonely standing there. A mystery makes any place on earth lonely. Nevin was anything but the worrying kind, but for a few minutes now he indulged in a real fit of worrying. If he had to drive that mob of sheep himself, with no help but that of the dogs—

He could have sworn, before, that Nagubi liked him, respected him, would at least give a word of warning or explanation before lighting out!

The mystery grew. He noticed something wrong about his pack dump. He had the out-back man's eye for details, and now one detail was wrong. He went over everything until he had it spotted and his suspicion confirmed. His boys had taken a big coil of rope with them.

He needed that rope. He used a lot of it for halters and camel-lines and pack-ties. It was valuable prop-

erty. They had no damned business taking it. Nevin could take it easy up to a point, for he had an admirable control of temper. This was the point. He was angry now—more than angry.

He grabbed his rifle, and with wrath in his heart, he headed for the native camp. He had never shot a man in his life, but maybe now he would!

The ground was dotted with the tribe's night fires. He made for the largest one, for that would be where the group of old men sat, and Mulluna. The red light splashed on their bearded faces and reflected in the little black eyes a look that was curiously akin to one of amusement, as if in their minds they fondled a thought that gave them pleasure—the look, it might be, of people who have just completed an eminently satisfactory business deal. Nevin was far beyond noticing it.

Mulluna began to speak, but Nevin cut him off.

"Shut up! Fetch out those three boys of mine and fetch out the rope they stole! And quick!"

"Rope?" said Mulluna. "What rope, white feller?"

Nevin swore at him. "You know damned well what rope, you old black buzzard! Get it, unless you want plenty trouble, see?"

"Ai-hat! 'Trouble?" Mulluna was grinning. "You think you make'm fight? We got plenty fighting men, white feller."

That was obviously true. They had come over from the other fires at the sound of Nevin's voice, and they were now gathered at the rim of light around him. Mulluna grinned wider.

"Shooting-stick you carry make you feel big, and white-feller troopers that ride with plenty *hamillie* make you feel strong, too. But you only one white feller, only one shooting-stick. Better you make not so loud talk. Go way. Black fellers not like'm smell of white man."

Nevin's rifle came up short and hard. He knew he had no hope if they really decided to do him in, but he was gambling on one thing, and that was Mulluna's love of life.

"Black fellers chuck a spear at me, you die too," he said. "Get that rope!"

There was an interminable pause. Mulluna was staring at the finger crooked around the trigger. His hand rose, hesitated, fell again. It might have been the beginning of a signal; if it was, he thought better of it. He was old, but old men cling to life.

So he turned and said something in the tribal dialect, and the other old men near him grinned and nodded vigorously. There was suddenly an easier feeling in the air.

"Might be you talk'm no more 'bout rope, us feller talk'm no more 'bout stock no come to water," Mulluna said.

"You keep the rope—you let my sheep drink?"

"Thass right."

This baffled Nevin. They'd turn down tobacco but accept rope! What was the rope's charm?

"Well," he said slowly, "that's all right, maybe, but—well, I need some of that rope. Half of it, say. If I give you half rope, you let my sheep come to water?"

Mulluna spoke again with the other elders, and nodded.

"Come with sheep in morning to water, we give'm half rope, then white feller go 'way."

"How about my boys?"

But on this there was nothing doing. "Boys go with white feller if they want, but they no want."

Nevin was almost his old reasonable self now. "All right," he said. "You ask boys, and if they don't want to come with me, then let 'em stay. I'll come for the rope and the water in the morning. And we're all friends."

He nodded and turned to go—and at that moment heard the hail:

"What's going on here?"

Another white man was walking forward into the camp from the surrounding darkness, a big man, bearded, a heavy rifle in the crook of his arm. Nevin stared at him in amazement.

"Where'd you drop from?"



"I've been catching up with you for a couple of days—I'm heading up north, looking around for new cattle country. My name's Bornson. I came over to see what the argument was about." He raised his deep voice suddenly. "And listen, you bloody black fellers, you get too cheeky with them spears and see what happens!"

"There's no need for shooting," Nevin said. "Everything's all right now."

"You mean you could have walked away from here without spears in your back? Rot! I've been watching from outside the firelight, and I saw how they was itching to let loose on you." He glanced at Nevin's rifle. "Single-shot, eh? You're a fool. You ought to carry a service rifle like mine, with good hole-drillers in the magazine. Roll over a bunch of blacks in a heap, and the rest'll quit like rabbits."

NEVIN knew this kind of man; perhaps the tribe did too. But their white skin allied them, to say nothing of that thirst of Nevin's for talk, the sound of another white man's voice. He might have wished for better company, but he was in no position to pick and choose. He told Bornson his name, and that he was driving his sheep to the Northern Territory; and Bornson said he'd travel with him. He had tied his camels near Nevin's, out in the saltbush. They walked back together.

"Bleating like they're thirsty," he observed as they neared the sheep. "Haven't you had 'em to water?"

"I just fixed up a deal with the blacks. For some cockeyed reason they'd set their hearts on some rope of mine, so I agreed to give them half of it in return for the right to water."

Bornson's surprise was evident; it soon turned to something rather like contempt. "I'll tell you, brother," he said, "you've got the wrong idea: You don't deal with blacks like that."

"How do you, then?"

"Why, you take your rifle and damn' well tell 'em what you want, and if they squawk, why then—"

"Shoot 'em up, eh?" said Nevin.

"Right you are! They can't stand up to a rifle. They're lily-livered, the whole bunch of 'em." His glance seemed to imply that there might be others who owned no more courage. "If there's any trouble tomorrow at the water, I'll show you what I mean. I don't mind knocking a few of them kicking."

Nevin was a reasonable man, and it was a pleasure to hear talk again, any kind of talk, even this kind; so he made his voice polite.

"Well, you know, Bornson," he said, "I'd rather you didn't. I think you've got an old-fashioned idea. These black fellers live in a primitive way, and all that, but they've got sense; and after all, when you think of it, it was their country in the beginning. You don't have to shoot your way through it any more. Fifty years ago, maybe; but any shooting among blacks and whites now is generally due to some misunderstanding, like that rope, for instance. The point is, if you're aiming to travel with me, there won't be any trouble at that hole in the morning, and there won't be any shooting. You understand?"

Their eyes held for a moment. A flush rose under Bornson's skin. "All right, brother," he said. "No hard feelings."

"Of course not," said Nevin. "None at all."

They were on the trail half an hour after sunup. Everything had gone off very peaceably at the waterhole; Mulluna had come forward with half the coil of rope, and the stock had watered. His black boys, Mulluna told Nevin, preferred to stay where they were, and Nevin was good as his word and said no more about it; sooner or later, he supposed, even the best of them—even Nagubi—grew tired of the white man and went native, particularly when times were not hard. He had Bornson to help him now, and so his need was not so dire.

The blacks' camp dropped behind. They drove slowly onward.

But at noon, when they stopped for a meal, Nevin saw the twisting fingers of smoke rising again back there. He commented on it to Bornson.

"Probably setting themselves up for a big shindig to celebrate getting the rope. I'd give something to know just why they put so much store by it."

Bornson's response was a question. "Where'd you say you was taking these sheep?"

"Ultanna," Nevin replied, glad to talk. "Man called Griggs settled in up there. I've never seen him—I made the deal with an agent of his, but he seems to be well fixed, the way he's buying stock."

"What's he giving you?"

"Thousand pounds on delivery."

He regretted those words later. He regretted even more bitterly his easy-

going nature and his desire to have someone to talk to, anyone, even a man such as Bornson. For he was sandbagged as he lay in his hammock. When he came to, he found himself with a lump the size of an egg on his aching head, and Bornson standing over him in the first faint light of dawn. A capable job had been done of binding his hands and feet.

"You don't belong out in this country, brother," Bornson observed. "You with your single-shot rifle and your ideas about blacks! Maybe they'll find you here, maybe not; but anyway, by that time I'll have finished the drive for you and delivered the sheep and collected the thousand pounds—hell, I'll even give this Griggs a receipt, signed with your name, all legal and proper."

Then he left. The sheep, the horses, the camel buckboard and the dogs went with him, though the latter none too willingly. On a rise of ground he stopped the buckboard for a moment and looked at smoke-signals lifting in the early light. After that he looked at Nevin, as if wondering if the blacks would find him and what they would do if they did. Then the buckboard slumped down the rise out of sight.

Nevin set to work on the rope, a part of that very same rope he had traded to Mulluna in return for the right to water. He rolled himself through the sand to a rock that lay some twenty feet distant, brought his bound wrists to the rock and began to saw them against it. The sun mounted into a sky naked except for a tiny curling tendril of smoke; Nevin closed his eyes against it, but that was not much better, nor did it help to turn his head sidewise into the sand. The blaze of heat sought him out and baked the moisture out of him, so that by afternoon his whole body was parched and brittle and the skin cracking on his face.

He lay twisting his hands up and down, up and down, and reckoned with despair the hours it took to eat through one small fiber. He had chosen that rope too well, he thought; and this was a smooth rock, with no sharp edge. He thought for a long time about that rope. His thoughts began to wander somewhat by the end of the eternal day, and by and by he was acting out again in his mind the scene by the waterhole, when he had traded the rope to Mulluna. Only, this time there was a difference. This time he said to Mulluna: "Keep the whole coil of rope. I don't want any of it, because this fellow beside me is planning on tying me up with it, and if there isn't any, he won't be able to, and I'll be able to finish up the drive with the sheep myself, and get that thousand pounds I've traveled over half Australia for. So keep the rope."

But then, if Mulluna had kept all the rope, then probably Bornson would have put one of those heavy slugs into him instead, so maybe it was just as well he did keep half the rope. He was still alive, anyway.

He could stick it out about one more day, he thought. When he considered what would be happening then, here in the sand, with the rope half worn through, maybe not even that—then his thought twisted back again, and he wished that Mulluna had kept all the rope, after all. A bullet was tenderer mercy than death from thirst and sand and sun.

The rope, eventually, was the center of all his thoughts. One thing he wished he could settle before he died. Why had Mulluna wanted it?

He fell asleep on it, at last, his bloodied wrists still bound firmly behind him with a rope no more than half worn through.

THE night cold awakened Nevin. Then a sound—a whisper of sound, a stir in the sand. He roused up as best he could. He saw, outlined faintly against the starlight, the shape of a horse. Bornson, then, he thought. Bornson, come back to finish him off.

"So you got scared, did you?" he said into the darkness. "You thought maybe I'd work loose?"

Someone was bending over him; it wasn't Bornson. It was Nagubi, his Number One boy. He had a knife, and he cut Nevin free.

"No talk," he whispered. "No talk'm now. Talk by and by."

He helped Nevin to the horse. It seemed impossible at first to mount, but soon his blood was restored to circulation, feeling and strength came again in his limbs, and he was able to manage it. Nagubi ran at the horse's head in a tireless lope. There was no sound except the pad of feet in the sand, and a low breathing.

When they did stop, the gray light of nearing dawn was over the land, and Nevin heard sounds he knew, the sounds of sheep. There they were, a ghostly herd, and the hobbled camels, and the dogs guarding the sheep, and the horses—all as they had been night after night, all as if nothing had happened, as if there had been no Bornson.

There was no Bornson here now. Only Nagubi, his body streaked with sweat after that long run, his belly rising and falling as he breathed.

Nevin could have kissed him, right then. Instead he asked:

"Just where the devil have you been? What happened to you?"

It was the smoke-signals, Nagubi gave him to understand. The smoke had ordered him to join the tribe. He was supposed to stay with the tribe, so that no word would ever get out of what the tribe had done. But he had got away, finally.

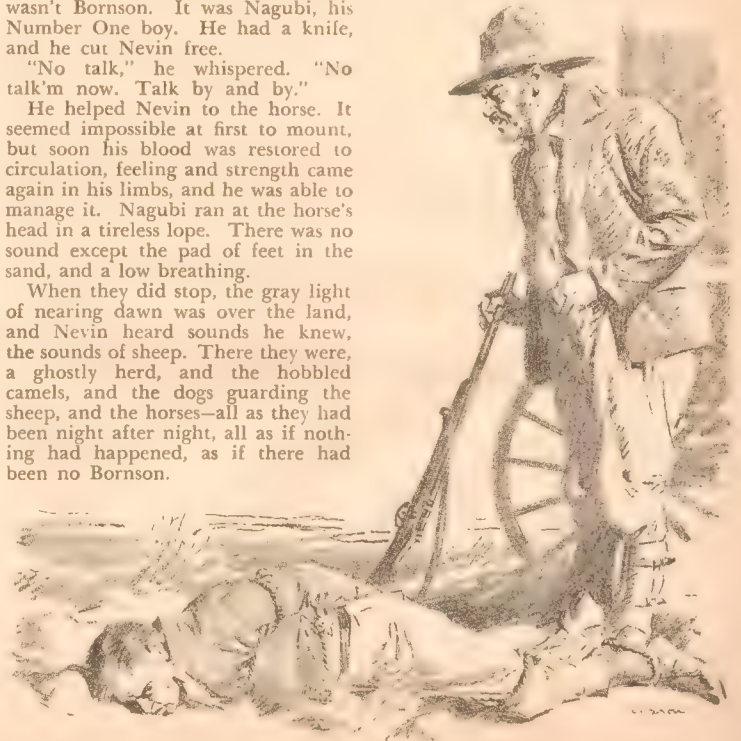
"Where's the other white feller?" Nagubi uttered a sound that might have been indicative of pleasure.

"White feller back there at corroboree. Black fellers trail him all day, wait for him to sleep, then take'm. All finished now."

"Why didn't they take the sheep too—the camels, all this?"

"No want sheep and kamillie. Only want white feller—any white feller. Old men of tribe say: 'If man kills other man by spear in belly, then kill that man too by spear in belly.' Long time ago, black feller here taken by Gov'ment, killed by Gov'ment by rope around neck—"

Then Nevin understood: what might have happened to him had not Bornson come along—and the mystery of the rope. . . . The necessary rope.



"You don't belong out in this country, brother," Bornson observed.



THE German officer led John Bushnell to the far end of the glassed-in porch. The steep slope descending to the shore could not be seen from this angle, and the two men stood as if suspended in space, with the white gulls circling between them and the remote shimmering surface of the fjord, a glistening slash of green and blue cutting deeper into Norway through snow-crested mountains.

Lieutenant Rittlow then started to talk rapidly, in a low voice. His English was fluent, but his tone and his accent held a harsh, sinister cadence: "Up here I am not supposed to be, Jack. Not today. But I have come to tell you again: Go away. Go to Sweden first, then go home. This place—" He lifted his massive chin to indicate the superb panorama: "This place stinks. I cannot tell more. You must understand. Isn't it?"

"Sure. Thanks."

They were silent for a moment, the big rugged man in the gray uniform, and the little aging man in a blue sweater and corduroy slacks.

"When do you go, Jack?"

"In a little while, I guess."

Jack tried to hide his grin. He knew that Rittlow liked him well, and was sincere. But he felt that the German was too much impressed with his own importance, the power of his own kind, that he manifested amusing awe of the very machine in which he was a cog.

"You must go soon. Tomorrow."

"Come on, Dutch! What are your Heinies going to do to me? Eat me alive? Shoot me?"

"You laugh. You kid me." Rittlow lifted his peaked cap to mop his forehead. "Good. But scram. Look, why do you stay with those Norwegians?"

"I told you, I told your boss: for my health."

"No. I know you. There is something else. There is."

"Sure. I'm an international spy."

"No, nol!" Rittlow shook his head. "Do not say 'spy!' Spy is not a joke word here. Not a joke word. Your health, it will be better away from here. For myself also, I am worried." The officer moved his head slightly to indicate the four uniformed men standing by the wall, carbines in hand, silent and glum. "They know I talk to you in English. I have explained. Still, all may not be believed. And there are things I know I do not talk about."

Jack smoothed his sparse hair with one hand.

WILD

A New York fight manager finds himself battling the Hun in occupied Norway.

"You mean the guys here aren't keeping their nose clean?"

"No. If I know that, I do my duty."

Jack considered his friend a moment, while filling a pipe. He was fifty-one and not subject to panic or enthusiasm. And his life had been such that contact with men wearing uniforms, soldiers or police, did not cause him undue perturbation. Moreover, he was an American citizen.

"You take this stuff pretty serious, don't you, Dutch?"

"The war?" Rittlow lifted his hands. "Yes. I saw it. Not here. In France." The hands turned, palms down, gestured sweepingly: "A whole city. Two hours. Level like a pie-dish. Two hours." He seemed to brood on this for a while, then resumed: "Does Skougaard ever ask you what I talk about to you? Be sure to explain. Ask him if my advice is not good."

"You mean maybe he'd think I'm tipping you off to something?"

"He's Norwegian. Gets ideas."

"He ought to know there's nothing I can tell you."

"Ja, nothing." He turned, lifted his voice, speaking in German. The corporal opened the house door, shouted in Norwegian. "I have asked for him. I'll tell him."

Thirty seconds later Harold Skougaard came through the door and until he stood beside the German, Rittlow had seemed very big to Jack. But his mere five feet eleven inches shrank as Harold came near, with his six feet four inches of height, the tremendous breadth of shoulders and chest in the white sweater. Jack knew him to be a year over forty, but could not believe it. The giant had a mop of straw-colored hair; his fair skin was weathered red; and save for the tiny creases around his eyes, the face was smooth, firm flesh snug over strong bones.



HUNT

by Georges Surdez

"You know I'm an old friend of Jack's," Rittlow started. "Just as you are. I tell him he should go away. You know I am right. The wartime is bad for all of us here, Germans and Norwegians; and anyone who can go should go. Yes."

"There is no more war in Norway," Harold said slowly. This remark seemed to infuriate Rittlow, for some reason.

"You know damn' well what I mean, Ole."

"My name is not Ole. It never was Ole." Harold spoke English precisely, almost without accent. His blue eyes looked at the soldier, steadily, honestly. "As an armistice has been signed, there is no more war in Norway. Jack is my guest. I know of no reason for him to go until he is tired of it here. You want me to say that there is a war in Norway. But if I said it, you would say I am talking sedition."

"But if anything happened, and Jack got mixed up in it—"

"What can happen?" Harold wondered mildly. "There is no more war in Norway. I obey orders. I report to town when needed. Why should anything happen at my farm?"

"Maybe you think I am a sucker." Rittlow was growing red with indignation. "But you know Jack's an American, and don't know what he's up against. He did me a favor, years ago, and I don't want him to get into a mess. You're not as smart as you think, Ole."

"My name is not Ole," Harold repeated calmly.

"Good. Good." Lieutenant Rittlow turned and uttered a series of syllables in German, and three of the men left. "Now, Skougaard, I want everybody gathered in your main building, while my soldiers search your place. That means every man, woman or child."

"That is already done," Harold nodded. "I called them as soon as I saw your patrol coming up the path. I know the routine."

Rittlow marched through the door, after nodding at the remaining soldier. The man, a young, square-shouldered fellow, hefted the repeating carbine, smiled faintly. He came out on the porch, and kept his eyes on Harold and Jack with much ostentation.

"Hope you aren't pulling off anything, Ole," Jack said. "The Germans can search a hundred times," Harold said, without resenting the "Ole" when Jack used it. "They can find nothing where there is nothing." Skougaard reflected a long time before going on: "That German is a friend of yours, Jack. He means well."

"I told you I did him a favor, years ago. He ran a small club, in Cologne. And he went flat broke. I had that little frog bantam at the time, and I brought him without a guarantee, to fight a local boy. Then I took only twenty-five hundred marks and expenses, when my guy'd been pulling down thirty thousand francs minimum. Kept Rittlow in business, and I guess he hasn't forgotten."

"He takes a chance, speaking to you privately." Harold smiled, glanced casually at the soldier standing ten feet away. "I could grab his gun as I passed by." And as the man automatically jerked the muzzle of his weapon higher, the big fellow laughed. "Understands English, all right! But I wonder if Rittlow picked him to listen to us, or if he was assigned to listen to Rittlow and you. I haven't seen him before. How about it, friend?"

The trooper, aware that he had been tricked, did not reply, but his face set hard. Jack watched him, and grew uneasy. He had seen killers, and knew that this guy was eager to shoot, to kill. Most of the Germans he had met appeared good-natured enough, deplored the war readily. But a few of them were keyed up, kill-crazy; and this was one of them.

"Watch it, Ole, watch it," he murmured. "Yeah, war's tough on friendships. I was in the regulars during the war, Second Division—"

"I know," Harold said gently. "You sent my kid an American rifle when you got your bonus. These people took it, although it was only a small gun." He brought a pipe out of his trousers pocket and filled it with slow, deliberate movements of his huge hands. He struck a match. "I didn't like that."

"Who would?" Jack retorted. "But they probably figure that you can kill a man just as dead with a .22 as a .32, if you hit the right place." He laughed. "They get pretty jittery. Do you remember the night they scrambled all over the place, because they had heard an English boat was in the fjord?"

"I've heard some people say they had heard a boat," Harold admitted. "And that it had ammunition and rifles aboard. Why it brought them, I cannot say. There is no more war in Norway."

Rittlow returned, barked an order at the man, who came to attention, presented arms and left.

"I had to make a search, Skougaard," he then said. "I came here off schedule, have to put the visit in my report. I'll explain that I thought a surprise call wouldn't hurt." "That bum of yours savvies English," Jack informed him.

"I thought he did, although it isn't on his record. Probably a little attention from my captain." Rittlow shrugged. "Doesn't like me. He's a Von Tattenbach, you know, professional officer, and I'm a reservist and not a gentleman. Doesn't like the idea of eating at the same table with a guy who's handled prize-fighters. He doesn't like you, Jack. Thinks you're an impudent Yankee."

"He does?"

"Yes." Rittlow hesitated, then went on recklessly: "Look, I may not get a chance to see you again. I have a hunch I'll be transferred soon. I again tell you to leave. If I get through this all right, we'll have some beer and kraut at that dump in Hoboken. I wish I'd stayed there." He offered his hand to Jack. "Well, so long and good luck—"

"I won't forget this, Dutch. I know you've pulled for me more than was good for you."

"Nuts." Rittlow laughed shortly, extended his hand to Harold. "So long, Ole. No hard feelings." And when the big Scandinavian hesitated, he urged: "Come on; there is no more war in Norway—so far as we are concerned."

Harold then grinned and engulfed the hand in his big paw.

"So long, Dutch."

THE German led the way through the house and into the yard, where the detachment was waiting. He was no longer "Dutch" Rittlow but again an officer of the conquering army, arrogant, stiff, unsmiling. He did not look toward Jack again, took no notice of the small crowd of laborers, women and children, but shouted orders in a crackling string.

Rasping grunts echoed from the noncoms; the armed detachment clicked into action, marching like a machine. There were several hundred yards to cover, on the narrow path dropping from ledge to ledge down the flank of the immense cliff, from the broader terrace on which the farm was located, to the road where the motorcycles had been left under guard.

Jack had witnessed these departures of patrol two or three times a week for months. But he was still gripped by a strange, undefined anguish, an intolerable sense of doom. For his good friends the Norwegians, ordinarily cheery, then became remote from him, linked by an overwhelming emotion he could not bring himself to share, a surging, virulent hatred for the gray soldiers. That emotion was so intense, so poignant, that it radiated from them all, from their tense bodies, from the hard eyes in their mute, expressionless faces.

Only when the motors sputtered to life down below, echoing from across the way, and receded rapidly, did the little crowd disperse, the women go back to their endless tasks, the children to their chores or games. The men scattered after exchanging a few words. And these words Harold did not translate. They evidently held no interest to an outsider, a neutral.

All the grown men on the farm, including Skougaard, had fought against the Germans during the stubborn, mur-

derous campaign in which a nation of less than three million peaceful folks resisted the mobilized might of an empire of eighty million.

When their ammunition had been fired, when French and British expeditions had been driven from their homeland, they had surrendered their rifles on orders from Oslo. But in the ten short weeks they had fought, ninety thousand German soldiers had died in the North. Thirty thousand were at the bottom of the sea; sixty thousand were buried in the Norwegian earth or consumed in funeral pyres.

And now there was no more war in Norway.

JOHN BUSHNELL, better known in boxing circles as Jack Bush, was in Scandinavia on his legitimate business. He was scouting a heavyweight prospect. And he had been doing just that for more than thirty years, without much luck.

The quest had taken him completely around the earth, in the years following the First World War. He had managed fighters of various weights, had eked out a meager living, but his only taste of real success had come when he had taken charge of Harold Skougaard. They had met fourteen or fifteen years before in Shanghai, when Harold, on shore leave from a sailing-ship, had knocked out Jack's current "bum" in an impromptu bout in a bar.

Unfortunately for both, Harold had been twenty-seven, too old to learn his trade thoroughly. He could fight but could not box; and a fast man who could keep away from his heavy punches ordinarily beat him on points. But the Norse, six feet four inches tall, two hundred and forty pounds on the hoof, had been popular under the name of Ole Svenson, because he had color, courage, took his lickings gamely—and was always good for a humorous column.

For three years Jack had contrived to jockey him into profitable bouts, from one end of the States to another. Then he had been matched with a fading star in what was called "an elimination tournament." On that occasion, certain gentlemen had approached Jack with certain propositions. All around, they said, it was best for the big name to win. Jack did not even mention this to Ole, whom he knew to be too honest to take a dive.

Ole lost on an alleged foul in the seventh round, although he had not struck a body blow in several rounds. That seemed to disgust him with the ring, and he vanished, leaving Jack a note informing him that he had enough money to buy a farm and marry his sweetheart. And although Ole fought a few times in Europe, and scrupulously sent his old manager a cut, he never consented to return. Then he retired for good.

Meanwhile, Jack knew dark days. In speculations and at the races, he had lost the money made with Ole. The prospects he discovered deserted him as soon as they were worth their keep. He sank so low that a sports magazine published an article by a reporter concerning him and his proverbial bad luck. Some weeks later, he received a letter from Harold, enclosing one hundred dollars and an invitation to come for a visit of several months, to Norway. He had arranged for Jack's passage with a steamship line.

Jack accepted. A war had started in Europe, that was true, but it was a mild struggle, respectful of neutral shipping, and he had never seen Norway, a country that could not be involved by any stretch of the imagination. Moreover, it meant several months free from money worry.

Harold Skougaard met him at Oslo. The years did not seem to have marked Harold; he had the same expression of studious concentration as he had had when he had admitted that he would like to earn a lot of money.

"I'm not Ole now," he corrected very soon.

Under the tactful pretense that Jack had not arrived prepared for Norwegian weather, he led him into shops. People everywhere treated him with respect; important-looking gentlemen lifted their hats in the streets.

"What do you do now, Ole?" Jack inquired.

"I have a farm. I am not Ole."

"Say, you talk English better than before," Jack complimented. "Sort of—cultured, you know."

"I have studied. The winters are very long, and I have much time. I get books and magazines from the States and England."

A light broke on Jack then. He considered his ex-"bum" with damp eyes: "Listen, Ole, did you read that junk about me, about my being washed up? Is that why—well—why you invited me over here?"

Harold's face glowed like the midnight sun.

"I read it. I did not believe it, of course. Not all. But I understood you were not very busy. So I thought we could do business together—damn' good business, Jack. No, I'm not kidding. Remember what you told me, that night in San Diego? That if you had got hold of me when I was sixteen or seventeen, you'd have made me champion?"

"Sure. I still think so."

"Well, there's a boy working for me. He's seventeen. Already big, and still growing." It was curious to see Harold grow enthusiastic. His voice did not change; his words came no more quickly, but the air around him seemed to throb. "Never would I have been the fighter he will be. You know, you cannot say it in words, but you feel it when you see him box. He has intelligence, but not too complicated."

"Norwegian?"

"Yes, sure. His father was a fisherman. His mother died five years ago; she was working for us. So I kept him." A gentle, broad, slow grin spread over Harold's face. "You don't need to change his name. He is Olaf Eriksen."

They took a coastal steamer to reach the farm, in a fjord north of Bergen. Harold did his duty as a host with overwhelming efficiency, spared Jack no points of scenic beauty to be admired, no statistics on the height of cliffs, the speed of currents, the degrees of temperature. He stuffed Jack with the right dishes and had him sloshing with assorted fluids. But from time to time he would drift back to Olaf.

"I get a newspaper from the States once," he said, for instance. "Before Joe Louis is very famous. Just a good boy coming up, a hard puncher. There is a photograph of him, sitting down in his dressing-room, and that big clown Maxie Baer, he is shaking hands, grinning. Baer, he is champion, he is big, he is rich, with a fine suit, he is—protectoring. Right then, I think: some day, that young black boy, he'll knock the clown kicking. I see Louis has something; he is marked *great fighter*. I look at Olaf now, and I think: You're just a Norwegian fisher kid. Some day you will knock good men kicking—"

"Handsome?"

"Norwegian good-looking." Harold was conservative.

Jack braced himself for a disappointment. The old fighters were proverbially poor pickers of ring material. Several former heavyweight champions have tried to bring out a worthy successor; not one has succeeded. And Harold had been away from the game some years. Possibly a lad who looked good in a Scandinavian village might not set the world on fire. Yet he remembered that Harold had shown good judgment of other fighters, had been right more often than wrong.

IN any case, the big fellow appeared to have plenty of money, and a few thousand would not break him. Nevertheless, Jack wished to be honest with a man who was proving such a generous friend.

"Look, Ole; I'll give you my frank opinion of the guy," he said. "Oh, I'll take him on anyway, because I need the dough—what's the use of kidding you? I lived on sandwiches for months back in New York. I'll do my best with him, see, but I can't guarantee—"

"It is my speculation." Harold looked at the gray sea unrolling toward the mountainous shore, puffed at his



Something crashed against Jack's chin and he was lifted off his feet.

pipe. "About what I am doing, it must be spoken justly. I am a rich man. I have now more money than when I left the ring. But without you, I would be nothing. Nothing is wrong. I would be a good man. But I would be a sailor, not too young—perhaps a bosun, maybe a mate. Over the world I would go, even in these war-times. I might be torpedoed. All I have, you started for me."

"It wasn't a favor, Ole. I got mine."

"Yes. A deal is a deal, yes. But there were times when you could have made big money just for yourself, tricking me, I know. And you said no; you were square with me."

"How in hell—"

"After you said no, they came to me. They told me not to be a sap. It was fifteen thousand extra if I plunged. Dived, yes. And if I did not, they'd fix it anyway, and then—fix me. That is why I left. Left in haste. They were sore. They knew the foul was phony; lots of people said so. What did they offer you?"

"The same. But I knew you wouldn't play. Told them so."

"When I have spent fifteen thousand on you, I tell you. Then you start saying thank you."

There was not much to say to this. Jack nodded.

They landed at a small port nestled in the pocket of a deep fjord, Laevik. An old car took them up and up the flank of the cliff that towered above the lagoon. Jack had seen a good many picturesque scenes in his wanderings, but admitted that this had class. They covered the last stretch of climbing on foot, as the path was too narrow for the automobile. Hugging the cliff on a wide natural terrace, Harold's farm was quite impressive. He was proud of it and was not too modest, pointing out the electric lights, the telephone, the bath- and shower-rooms.

The buildings themselves were old, but Harold had modernized them. One of the barns, a regular old-fashioned *stabur*, had been made into a small gymnasium. But the man's real pride was his own domain, the house into which no one came save at his invitation. He had had the windows facing the fjord enlarged enormously, covered the gaps with sheets of glass, double, of course. The furniture was French, modern style. There was a study-library, shelves holding several thousand books, in five languages. There were water-colors, signed *H.S.*, which, so far as Jack could know, were rather good. There were framed photographs bearing autographs of famous friends. There was a radio of imposing size, an automatic phonograph, a library of records.

"Swell," Jack agreed. "You've got a nice little dump here. But how do you support it? I don't know much about farming, but the outfit you have don't look like it was big enough—"

"The farm," Harold told him, "is not to make money. It is to live on. I invested in—in utilities, electric plants and so on, you know, but mostly in fishing. Many of the boats you saw down there belong to my company. I am a director. Every time I got money, I figured my living until the next fight, and tax to be paid—and sent the rest here. And when I get back, I don't cut into it. I need furniture—I fight in France a couple of times, buy the best. I need machinery—I fight in Germany." He corrected his speech. "When I had what I needed, I quit for good."

Jack was amazed by his friend's thrift and good sense. Yes, it was true, what he had spent in a single night when he was flush might have bought an interest in one of the motorized fishing-boats on the fjord. One season's losses at the races would have paid for everything in this beautiful house. Money was not merely something to spend, evidently—it could be crystallized in comfort and happiness.

For Harold was happy. Jack met his wife, a stout, pretty woman of thirty-five, who smiled a lot and spoke little. He saw the children, four of them, two girls already growing leggy and shy, two boys, one five, one two, who resembled nothing so much as working models of Big Ole. He was presented, ceremoniously, to the farmhands, most of them large, blond, wind-burnt gentlemen with enormous paws, to their wives, to their kids. All these people adored Harold, that was plain, and treated him with great respect, but without the least trace of servility or subservience.

Naturally, he looked eagerly for Olaf, the wonder boy. And as he was prepared to be, he was disappointed. The lad was tall, surely, at least six feet one, and well-knit. But he appeared awkward and timid when introduced. But if he had any ability at all, he was a find, Jack realized at once. Because of his Scandinavian complexion, his teeth, and his golden hair! He looked as Nordic as if it had been done on purpose; he looked clean—Jack sought for a word and found it—he looked chaste. But unless he could fight, all those qualities merely entitled him to the sedulous manuring of Norwegian cows.

"Kind of bashful," Jack remarked to Harold soon after. "We're grown men, and he is a boy. To talk much, would be fresh. Also, he knows you are a great manager from America. And if I did not tell him my plans, I told him he would have to box for you. He says maybe he is good for Norway, but not for American cities."

"If we can keep him that way," Jack admitted, "it will be a help. Most of them think they should get in the Garden, once they've knocked off a couple of tramps."

"I shall tell him to obey you," Harold declared with finality. He was sure, Jack saw, that his prestige would hold the young man in check across a few thousand miles of ocean. But a year in the States, his photo in the papers, and he would be asking whom Ole had ever licked. And yet—Harold had remained true to himself, even in the wind of success. Maybe this country bred them steady.

OLAF stripped well. Harold translated the kilograms into pounds: one hundred and eighty-eight and one half. Height: one meter eighty-six centimeters, a shade over six feet one inch. And with that size, he had the scrawiness of a boy still growing—he looked lean.

"I was no taller at his age," Harold stated. "He has three, four years more." He smiled. "He will be big enough. He will exercise awhile; then he will box with one fellow who knows a little. Just for show, no hard punch."

Olaf opened up on the bag, slow and self-conscious at first. Before long, he forgot the watchers, and did very well. He was smooth, fast. Jack listened to the familiar *slap-slap*, and almost forgot he was in Norway. He thought he understood what had so excited Harold Skougaard:

Memories, and the boy's graceful movements. A kid that age who was any good at all always looked like a champ. Almost any colt passes through a stage when he looks as if he might be a race-horse.

"Breathes all right. You been training him, Ole?"

"No need. Plain food and early hours up here. Hay on the slope is good work for the back. Going to town and back is road-work. I asked him not to use the car."

Another man entered the barn-gymnasium. A tall, broad, fine-looking man, twenty-seven or -eight. He went behind a partition to change; and when he emerged, Jack saw crossed American and Norwegian flags crossed in tattooing on his left forearm.

"This is Mr. Nysling," Harold said.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Bush. Yes, I was in America. Six years in the Navy. I'm going back next summer. Came home to see my mother, who was sick."

"Look me up," Jack said automatically.

THE two, Olaf and Nysling, started to box on the padded planking. Harold held the watch, announcing three two-minute rounds. Inside of fifteen seconds, Jack was tense, interested. He allowed that Nysling was merely a husky man with neither experience nor great skill. But there was no denying that Olaf handled him without effort, dominated him without strain. Not because of anything he had learned, just because he sensed what to do. The difference is subtle, but it exists.

"Vat I said, eh, Jack?" Harold's accent grew thick for a second, as he saw Jack stare.

Olaf loved to box, that was evident. He had a good left, and kept Nysling off balance with it, with smart taps. The other was trying hard, because he was a man and performing before his boss. But Olaf was not only faster; he was stronger.

"Five bucks if you smack his jaw," Harold said in English.

A dozen times in the three rounds Nysling seemed to have earned his fee. But Olaf always moved his head, just enough, and the fist swung in space. Jack called to Nysling to shift to the stomach, and the boy's left elbow was there in time. He had an odd twist from the waist in dodging, which might be made into something. Yet it was not what he did that impressed, but his ease in doing it. He knew where he was all the time, and coordinated perfectly.

"Finished!" Harold rose and waved his hands. He patted the sweating Nysling on the shoulder. "You get five bucks all the same."

"He's shifty, Mr. Skougaard," the sailor said, panting. "But I am no good with gloves on. Right on my ship, we had a kid who'd take this one easy."

"Sure, sure." Harold smiled and spoke a few words in Norwegian. The two boxers vanished behind the partition. "Well, Jack, what do you think of him?"

"Looks O.K., what I seen. Better than I expected. I know he can sock, got nice big legs and good shoulders. Can he take it?"

"Can I punch, Jack?"

"About as hard as anybody, but—"

"But I'm an old man. Well, I can hit same as before, only I am slow. Always was slow, yes—I mean slower, even. Tomorrow, I box with him. Not one to see but you and me, and the boy. So nobody's feelings get hurt,"—Harold laughed,—"even if jaws are made sore."

"It's a date."

Stripped, Harold showed the passage of years to Jack's expert eyes. Shoulders, arms and calves were muscular, but a gentleman-farmer's belly swelled the trunks. Not a mass of jelly, but a comfortable stomach. His skin was very white, and beside him Olaf looked short, slim and pinkish. Harold had never been a good boxer; but a man who is offered fifteen grand to throw a fight against a star must have something. And Jack understood at once that



"The wild hunt is an old legend about souls coming out of hell for a spree—when there's murder coming."



"You will be executed if it is proved."

Olaf was partially incapacitated by the veneration he felt for a man who had been a famous fighter, who had been almost a father to him, and who was his boss.

Nevertheless he started to forget all this before many blows had been launched. Jack saw he had the right spirit for a fighter—anything that resisted him soon annoyed him. Harold bided his time, and suddenly drove a right hook to the stomach. A hard hook. The boy brought down his elbows, and caught one, two on the chin.

He was stung; he was rattled. Jack looked for him to lose his temper and plunge in. But Olaf clinched, tied up Harold very neatly, then cleared himself with a heave of shoulders and back that shoved the taller, heavier man three steps back. He was angry, that was sure. His eyes blazed like blue ice in the sun; his upper lip twisted. But he gave himself time to breathe, recovered.

There was no veneration, no hesitation in him now. He drove a straight left to the stomach, that sank in deeply; then another, and a third, and a fourth. Harold ripped him on the jaw with a right that should have knocked him flat. Olaf snorted, backed off, came in again. He was hooking to flunk and head in a flurry of punches, when Harold staggered him with a hard right. He hopped back, glared, and came on again.

"Time!" Jack called, stepping between them.

The boy stopped reluctantly. Twenty minutes later, while Jack was pasting tape at the corner of Harold's eye, Harold said: "It was not time. You should not have stopped him. He was doing well."

"Sure, and he probably would have knocked you down with the next one. Your legs were giving way. And if he had, he'd swell up like a balloon, go right-hand nuts on us for six months. I wanted him to stop on the short end, and I did it. But you were right. He's got lots of stuff."

How much stuff, Jack would not let himself think—when he did, he saw a hundred and ten thousand people in a park, and Olaf in the ring. He knew the boxing world, was aware that there was no prospect in sight likely to beat Joe Louis, not for years. There might be some kid somewhere, but the established performers just did not rate. And Olaf had an even start. In three years Louis would be past his prime, Olaf on the way up. In four, even better. The newspapers would go big on the contrast—Olaf was a very white White Hope!

("Jack Bush issues statement: between the third and fourth round—")

Harold looked up at him, standing with the tape in his fingers, doing nothing, and laughed.

"Who is gone goof now?" he asked. . . .

The winter fled with amazing speed. Jack ate well, exercised more than in years. He went hunting with Harold, attended affairs in town, danced like a twenty-year-old, and climbed through snow and storm before going to bed. He learned to say "*Tak for iafsten*" and to play card games at which he did not shine. Harold had decided not to let Olaf go to America until he was a full eighteen. And what Harold decided here was definitely decided.

Olaf was growing fast, almost visibly. And he learned quickly, because he had an immense respect for Jack. The two conversed in a dialect of their own, narrowed to the purposes of boxing. Nysling and a couple of the younger men were used as sparring-partners, and also did better under proper coaching. At night Harold and Jack would sit talking over old times, quarreling over incidents that no longer were remembered by anyone else.

Or they read. There was a complete collection of British detective stories and many American ones. Harold got a package of books from the States once a month and knew many things that he had picked up in his reading.

Often Harold told fairy tales to the children; and Jack wished he could understand, because it certainly appeared that he was going to town, from the expression on their faces. One evening, when the gale from the ocean was howling and booming between the walls of the fjord like a million pipe-organs gone mad, he asked a question:

"What was that you speiled to the kids after dinner, Ole? They lapped it up."

"Always do. I did. About the *Aasgaardsreia*."

"Sounds swell, but come again."

"The wild hunt: it's an old legend, about the souls of drunkards, bunis, booze-fighters, liars—you know—coming out of hell for a spree. They come mostly when they know there's murder coming. They ride big black horses, with eyes of flame, horses on which they use red-hot bits. I was telling the kids what to do if you hear them coming." Harold grinned: "You take a dive, go flat on your puss. And you say a certain prayer—three times."

"Must scare the liver out of kids."

"Not always, Jack. They enjoy the old legends."

NEWS of the German invasion came like a thunder-bolt. Harold announced it—he had received a telephone message from town. For the first time Jack experienced a sensation he was to repeat often. The circle of Norwegians seemed to close and press him out. He felt like an alien. And in the morning the grown men went down the cliff, to town. There were seven of them, and only five returned. Nysling was one of the missing. He had been blown to nothingness by an air bomb. Of the war itself the fjord saw nothing. The town was too small, too unimportant, to be made the object of a special attack. Planes flew overhead, but very far up. Two or three times, from the porch on which he sat alone, Jack heard the muttering of cannon out to sea. . . .

Then it was over, and Skougard returned with his men, changed from his sergeant's uniform into his ordinary clothing.

"Did you get any of the Heinies yourself, Ole?" Jack asked.

Harold nodded, shrugged, "Not enough," he said.

Soon after, a German steamer came into the fjord, landed a brace of companies in town. And the patrols started. Harold's radio was seized, all buildings searched for guns and cartridges. The telephone was cut off; there was a nine o'clock curfew for the lights. Much of the livestock was requisitioned. Harold did not protest; no one said anything. The patrol officers were not all alike. Some were polite, others unbearably arrogant. Once, when Jack spoke his mind to one of them, he was arrested and taken into town, to see the commanding officer.

"You are fortunate," the fellow told him in excellent English, "that you did not deal with a hasty man. Our patrols are under orders to quell resistance at once."

"I am an American citizen."

"Then you would have been a very dead American. I should have sent your passport to the nearest consulate, with a note of explanation and regrets. It would not have caused a ripple, Mr. Bushnell. We permit a ship to leave Sweden once a month for America. You should board it. You are fined a thousand marks."

At that time Harold had suggested that he should leave. But asking Jack to leave Olaf was like driving an old prospector from a gold-mine. It must be admitted, also, that he had become accustomed to the life, that Harold's funds were frozen by the war, and that Jack was afraid of landing in New York and resuming his circuit of the furnished rooms and lunch-counters.

He was honestly happy to see Rittlow, who came several months after the occupation. The region was used as a rest area for troops. Rittlow had fought in France, won the Iron Cross in the bloody shambles of Lille, fighting against the Moroccan Division. Jack had known him many years: in Paris, where the German had brought a tolerable welter; in Cologne, where Jack had helped him out of a hole; and in America, to which the German had offered a collapsible light-heavy.

Rittlow was a patriotic German and had a fanatical admiration for Hitler. Off that topic, he was reasonable enough. But Jack soon understood that his open friendliness with the soldier, the handshakes in public, were offensive to the Norwegians. Even Harold showed some concern. And the children, who detested the sight of the invaders, avoided Jack for days. Olaf disregarded his instructions for the first time.

"What the hell!" Jack protested to Harold. "Dutch is a decent guy. He's not to blame for what happens, any more than you are."

Harold thought the question over, before answering. "Yes, he is more to blame. He regrets war and having to be like a cop over us. But he says it is our fault for resisting his people. Millions like him are thinking it is wrong not to wish to accept as masters those who found a Hitler. Many of us Norwegians did not think Germany wrong before." He smiled sadly. "When it was Belgium, we believed their explanations. . . . Jack, you have a home—I mean some place where your people lived a long time, where you went to school?"

"Sure."

"If Rittlow had come into the house and looked all over—"

"My old man would have biffed him," Jack stated.

"No. I am very strong, and I do not biff." Harold shrugged wearily. "It's just that which hurts. You want to biff but you are afraid to biff, because of the wife, and the kids, and the farm that might be burned down. So do not give Rittlow a drink in friendship again. If he orders, all right; we are beaten and obey. Otherwise, my wife breaks the glass he drank out of and throws the bottle away. That is of course wasteful—and woman-silly. But women show feelings that way."

"She aint sore at me, Ole?" Jack wondered. He had noticed a definite coldness on Mrs. Skougaard's part, he realized now.

"She's not pleased. She says she believes you are my friend, but that you might talk without thinking of harm."

"Talk about what, for the love of Mike?"

"I don't know," Harold concluded. "She didn't say."

RITTLOW'S premonition that he would not return proved correct. The next patrol that came up was led by a bony, poker-faced young lieutenant. He spoke fluent Norwegian, and questioned Harold for an hour in private. The big man was pale, his hands trembling when he reappeared. Jack was about to question him

when the corporal who had understood English touched his shoulder.

"You must come with us to Laervik. Orders."

He was given no chance to talk with Harold. He passed before the mute group of farmers. He thought that Mrs. Skougaard looked at him pleadingly. What the devil was going on? What had Rittlow hinted at? Why was the woman so worried? Why had Harold been white, shaky?

When they reached the road, Jack was ordered into the officer's small car, squeezed between two riflemen. He tried to make conversation, as was his habit, in his halting German, but they did not reply. They proved as talkative as a carp on a block of ice. He was dumped before the small building on the waterfront that bore the emblem of the masters. The corporal led him across the waxed floors to a neat little room furnished as an office.

A RATHER young officer, with an intelligent face, marred by a black patch over his left eye, rose to meet him. He wore the ribbon of the Iron Cross, First Class. And to Jack's immense surprise, he was cordial.

"Mr. Bushnell?" A slim, tanned, strong hand gripped his. "I'm Tattenbach. I spent two years in the States, studying factory methods. Heard much of you, naturally. Wanted to meet you. Sit down. I have Canadian whisky, Scotch, cognac—which?" He indicated a tray bearing bottles, pushed forward a box of cigars. Dutch cigars, very good cigars.

Jack sat down and expanded. So this was Von Tattenbach, the snob? Good-looking young chap, fine wrists. Played tennis, it developed. Had lost an eye early in the war, in Poland. They talked about Joe Louis, and Schmeling, and whether the second fight had been fair. This went on for an hour. Jack asked about Rittlow.

"My colleague has been transferred. The lucky chap, he is still able to serve actively, while I have to waste away in this little village. Charming scenery, of course, but one wearies of calm. It isn't here like up where you are, Mr. Bushnell. All our news is official German news. While you have broadcasts from everywhere—"

"You people seized the radio up there," Jack reminded.

"Of course, of course," Von Tattenbach nodded, smiled, and winked his one visible eye. It was rather ghastly. "You cannot admit receiving news, because of your hosts. Perfectly all right with me. But some of the visitors must talk—"

"Visitors, Mr. Tattenbach?" Jack acknowledged the correction to "Captain." He shook his head. "Honest, no one comes up to see us any more. Seems they need a permit from your people each time."

"You did not see anyone lately?"

"No strangers, Captain."

Tattenbach looked at the tip of his cigar. "I shall assume you tell the truth. You do not know either how many German soldiers have been found in the waters of the fjord, shot, stabbed, killed in various ways, in the past two months?"

"Soldiers killed? I thought—"

"Nine," Tattenbach declared softly. "And we have seven missing, whom we can consider dead—in this single district. That is why we have discontinued the permanent posts in the mountains. We have fined the town, the villages. We have executed several persons. You say you heard nothing of this?"

"Not a thing, Captain."

"You know nothing of arms-smuggling, either? Nor of agents circulating in the outlying farms? I am quite ready to believe you, Mr. Bushnell. I have a mere suggestion to make. If you do find out anything, inform us."

"I suppose you'd pay me for it?" Jack asked.

"If the information was valuable, yes." Tattenbach restrained Jack's blurring indignation with a gesture. "You will understand that although you travel on a neutral passport, we must consider you an active enemy if you

have knowledge of attacks against us. Try to understand the fact that you will be executed if it is proved that you had such knowledge."

"I'd like to see you try that!" Jack snapped.

"Perhaps you will have the occasion." Tattenbach paused, then: "Today, Mr. Skougard has been told that if it should be proved that he received, communicated, transmitted news, that he sheltered snipers, or permitted his premises to be used for the storage of military contraband, he and every male over sixteen on his property would be summarily executed. You are in that category, Mr. Bushnell."

"Sure. But I'm an American."

"You have my heartfelt congratulation on that good fortune. I understand that Lieutenant Rittlow went beyond his strict duty in advising you to leave. This at the risk of warning the people up there that we suspected something, at the Skougard farm."

"You don't mean to say that he was transferred, punished, for trying to tip me off? Why, we were friends for—"

"Being transferred to an attack unit is not a punishment for a German officer, Mr. Bushnell. It's an honor."

"I get it. You rewarded him for talking out of turn by giving him the best chance to get bumped off that could be found."

"Rewarded him, that is excellent." The Captain waved his hand casually: "You may finish your whisky, Bushnell."

"No, thanks. German imitation, isn't it?"

It was not, and Jack knew it. But the remark somehow gave him some satisfaction. He was turned out on the street, without an offer to drive him back. But he found a friend of the Skougards, who hitched a horse to a dilapidated vehicle. It was dark when he reached the farm and told Harold what had happened.

"He did not speak of letting you go away?" Harold shook his head. "That is bad."

"You'd want me to go now? Then why, when Dutch—oh, I get it. You didn't want to let him see that you knew there was something going on that made it best all around for me to scram. That's why your wife is so worried. You knew about those isolated guards being knocked off and pitched into the drink—"

"The news and the announcement of the fines were posted right on our barns."

"I can't read Norwegian. Honest to gosh, Ole, I wasn't wise to a damn' thing." Jack started to laugh, a little nervously. "The way they act, I own up I wondered often why something didn't happen. I'm not yellow or anything, Ole, but I can do you no good here, and it's getting hot for me. How about me and Olaf scrambling?"

"For you, it is easy." Harold thought awhile. "I give you a letter to a friend of mine in America. He will lend you money or give you a job. He owns tugs. But Olaf, he is a Norwegian, and there is a Norwegian army with the English. He is near military age; they will not let him go."

"You're too honest for anything, Ole. There's a way of getting around anything. We can say he was born in America, or that he is an American citizen. You got Nysling's papers? The poor guy won't need them any more. I'll doctor them up—"

"You would forge a passport?"

"In a case like this? Like a shot! Don't worry, I can do a job that'll fool the Heinies. I didn't take fighters through Europe without learning a few tricks about papers."

"They did not look so close, because it was not war," Harold reminded him. "All you risked was a fine and maybe a few months in prison. Now—"

"They'd shoot you like a dog, you're right," Jack conceded sadly. "Yes, that's out. But let me stick around a few days longer, and I'll think of some way to get Olaf out. Meanwhile, I know nothing, see nothing, see?"

"Olaf—" Harold hesitated, then went on: "Olaf will not go with you. He wants to escape, but not to America. He wants to join our aviation in England."

"With the future he has? He's just a fool kid." Jack shrugged. "Tell him he might make himself a million bucks."

"I told him," Harold smiled faintly. "I explained to him that his case was different. Even said that he would be an honor to Norway by being a great fighter. But Olaf, he doesn't want a million bucks."

THE magnificent panorama of the fjord had become sinister for Jack. He could not look down without thinking of dead Germans drifting in the icy water, turning over and over endlessly, sluggishly. . . . Despite his good resolutions, he observed more than formerly. He woke up during the night and listened. He saw that on certain mornings Harold looked tired and worn.

He understood that the Germans could not possibly patrol the whole of Norway, that immense stretches remained unguarded. The country had a coast-line of fifteen thousand miles, due to the countless fjords. And Germany had to hold down France, Poland, the Balkans, had to keep a powerful army for further fighting. Her forces of occupation could not prevent isolated attacks: their sole weapon was terror.

Olaf had become surly with Jack. He still reported to the gym, went through drills. But he often ignored the older man's suggestion, pretended not to understand him, and at times glared at him with open dislike. On one occasion, when Jack pulled at his arm a bit roughly, to stress a point of defense, the youth jerked free with such strength that the little man stumbled.

"What's he got against me?" he asked Harold.

"You're a stranger. And he somehow thinks you're responsible for his being kept here during the campaign, that it was on your advice I wouldn't let him report to the army." Skougard lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "I'm his boss; I was kind to him, as was my duty; but he is sore at me too."

Jack then realized that he was in the way. Yes, he was a witness to their sufferings without sharing in them. He prepared for his departure, obtained a permit from the Germans to travel to Oslo, where the American service would repatriate him somehow.

He found himself gripped with a keen grief, as he realized that he had spent more than a year at the farm, that it was home. Here he had found health and rest—why, even his hair seemed thicker! Good food, regular hours, a bracing climate, exercise—no wonder he felt fit.

"If I ever get my paws on any dough again," he swore, "I'll get myself a little farm."

He forced himself to exclude Olaf from his plans. After the war was over, he would see. He would interest Harold's friends in America in backing him—Jack thought he knew where he could pick up some fair material, if he had some dough. Olaf was not the only pebble on the beach. He was stretched in his deep, soft bed one night, planning such things and listening to the wind roaring in the fjord, when a faint crackling attracted his attention. He closed his window, put on a dressing-robe, and went out on the enclosed porch. The electricity was switched off, as it was past ten o'clock.

He looked down into space for some minutes, saw nothing but a dim glimmer on the distant water. But he was sure that the crackling had been shooting. He lighted a cigar and paced nervously. More Heinies in the drink—or what? He sat down in one of the metal-framed leather chairs, in the corner. He was alone in this wing of the house, which linked to the main structure at the big dining-room. With the windows closed, he could hear the stormy wind, but no more shooting.

He must have dozed off, after finishing the cigar. For he heard no one coming, yet suddenly there were people on the porch. He identified Harold's tall silhouette against the panes. There was the beam of an electric torch—in its light, a pair of meaty hands turning a screwdriver.

The men, three of them, spoke in low voices, in Norwegian dialect. There was only one stranger here, for Jack knew the voices of the others. Carefully two of the fellows eased a whole section of the inner window to the floor.

Jack coughed, moved, and they were still, very still.

"Hello, Ole—guess I fell asleep here."

"Hello," Harold answered. Then he said something in Norwegian to the others, in which he repeated "Jack" three times. The American stepped forward. "I did not want you to know, not because I don't trust you, Jack, but to save trouble—"

The man with the screwdriver was loosening the horizontal slats closing the partition between the inner and outer windows. Then he reached in, brought out a rifle—another, a third. Jack knew that this was the cache the Heinies had been looking for. And it had been a splendid one, for the soldiers had searched this part of the house last, invariably, and the splendid view from the windows had drawn their attention, making them forget that the panes did not reach the floor level.

Harold lighted a kerosene lamp in the study, and the rifles were brought and laid on the big table there. Jack picked one up and examined it curiously. An excellent weapon, Mauser in type, caliber 6-m.m.-5, in excellent condition, oiled recently. Packages wrapped in greasy green-blue paper were dropped on the table also. The men ripped them open and inserted the loose shells into the slots of metal clips.

The stranger was thirty-three or -four, rather shorter than is usual for a Norse, his face brick-red and pleated like a baked apple. A peasant or a fisherman, a solid citizen. There was drying blood on his sleeve; he wore a bandage about his left hand.

"Something's gone screwy, Ole?"

"And how." Harold continued his task as he spoke. "You know, there are parties of men who have taken to the open country to fight as guerrillas. They need cartridges and grenades, new rifles. The British boats bring them, but we must carry them inland to a meeting-place. Tonight the Germans caught a party with four cases, two miles inland. Fifteen all told, fourteen without this man. We must make a diversion, so they can get back to the boat. If they can't do that before dawn breaks, they'll be surrounded, taken and executed."

"But the Heinies may get wise where the help came from."

"Yes. There is risk."

"What does your wife think of it?"

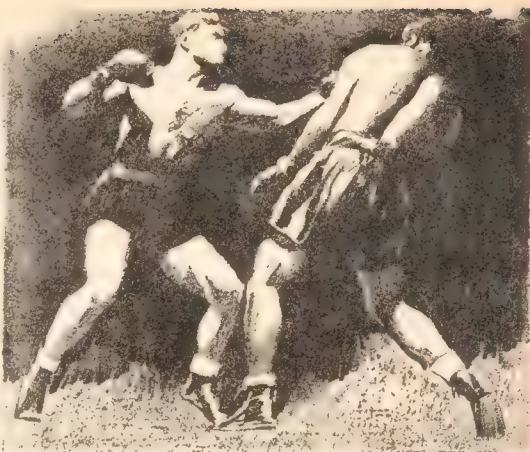
"I have said farewell to my wife. She will clean in here after we are gone, pick up and burn wrappers, so nothing shows. She knows how." He broke off to listen to the stranger, answered briefly, then said: "He says we must hurry. I said all right."

They headed for the outside, found three of the workmen in the hallway, standing quietly beneath the deer's head. These took a rifle each, cartridges. But as they made for the outside door, it opened and was blocked by Olaf, dressed in heavy clothing, like the others, wearing a big cap with button-flaps. Harold motioned him aside, but he stood his ground, stammering with anger.

Harold answered him in a rough tone, but the youth argued on, went so far as to menace his boss with his fist. Suddenly he leaped forward, shoved the oldest of the workmen against the wall, deprived him of rifle and cartridges by main force. The man slapped and cuffed at his face, but the lad merely snorted and did not stop.

Jack understood the scene all too well: Olaf had not been asked to go along, and he wanted to go. Harold had told him there was no weapon for him, and he had appropriated one. He wanted to go so much that he defied his benefactor, his respected boss, and had assaulted an older man! He wanted to go where a single bullet might kill him, or cripple him beyond possible use.

"Harold, don't let him go."



There was no veneration, no hesitation, in Olaf now. He snorted, backed off, came in again.

"No time to argue—can't stop to fight. Men will die if we are late. He is a good shot, too. Good-by, Jack. Remember, you know nothing—"

Olaf, still panting, with traces of tears on his red cheeks, was grinning, almost dancing with excitement. And he was taking away the best prospect Jack had ever laid eyes on. He was risking a glorious future and immense wealth for several men in a bushwhacking skirmish that would not affect the outcome of the war at all. He was crazy!

The others were in the yard already. Olaf was held by the man whose gun he had taken, who wanted it back. Jack leaped forward and hung on the youth's arm, pleading in broken Norwegian and hysterical English. And the loud was not listening, was shaking him off, snarling meaningless words and curses.

"Listen, Olaf—you can do more with money—buy an ambulance—a plane—" Jack twisted, kicked the door closed and stood with his back against it. "You savvy enough English to get what I'm saying. With money—"

Olaf had stepped back. He slipped his wrist through the strap of the rifle, so that it hung from his elbow and left his hands free. He got rid of the farmer by throwing him against the wall. Then his big hand came forward, the fingers grasped the dressing-robe. Something crashed against Jack's chin, and he was lifted off his feet.

HE lost track of events for some time. . . . Then he was seated in an easy-chair, in the study, staring at a big framed photograph of Ole in boxing trunks. There were pairs of gloves suspended at the sides. Odd, thought Jack, that he should have laced those gloves the only time they had been worn. How many years ago? Twelve, thirteen years—

The lamp was on the table. Mrs. Skougard was there, stooping over, picking up the blue-green wrappers. Her eyes were red, and she breathed audibly. When she turned and saw him, the tears started to flow again. She spoke in her soft, singing voice, something about men, madness and death.

Poor dame, Jack thought. This was doing things to her; she looked fifteen years older than when he had come. He remembered the night she had danced and sung, just before Christmas, 1939, blushing, bosom heaving, full of life, "Saa danser jeg dig imode"—with Harold making the planking quiver.

"It's a crazy world, lady," he said, and took a cigar.

Then swift pain shot through his face, stabbed to his brain and exploded as he tried to bite off the tip. He

felt of his jaw, and under the softer swelling, felt a lump the size of a lemon.

"Olaf," he said, springing up. "Olaf!"

The woman gestured widely, and wept more.

That was right; Olaf had gone into the night, with a Mauser in his paws. And it was too late to do anything about it now. He would be killed or crippled tonight, or taken and executed within a week. Because he was managed by Jack Bush. That was Jack Bush's luck. The poor kid—his record would consist of a single, not glorious line:

"1941. Jack Bush. K. O. . . 1 round. Norway."

THE Heinies could not do a thing to *him*, mused Jack, now back in bed. He was not mixed up with anything, had intended to leave. He had his German permit and a letter from the consulate to prove it. They could not do a thing. But the cold face of Von Tattenbach, with a black patch over one eye, came again and again. That polite guy was a killer. Jack knew killers; one occasionally meets them on the fringes of his profession.

Out of all the Germans Jack had seen around here, he had seen but six or seven naturally evil men—Von Tattenbach, the English-speaking member of Rittlow's last patrol, among them. But those supplied the leaven of death for the rest. For once the guns have started to shoot, when the reek of powder is in the air, almost all men become alike.

There was the distant, throbbing purr of a motor on the fjord, and occasional cracklings of gun-fire. And always one had to allow for the multiple echoes, for the beat of sound from wall to wall. Mrs. Skougaard was weeping; the other women were weeping. In the morning the kids would cry. And the men were out there, rifles in hand, killing and being killed. Only Jack Bush was in bed, warm and comfortable.

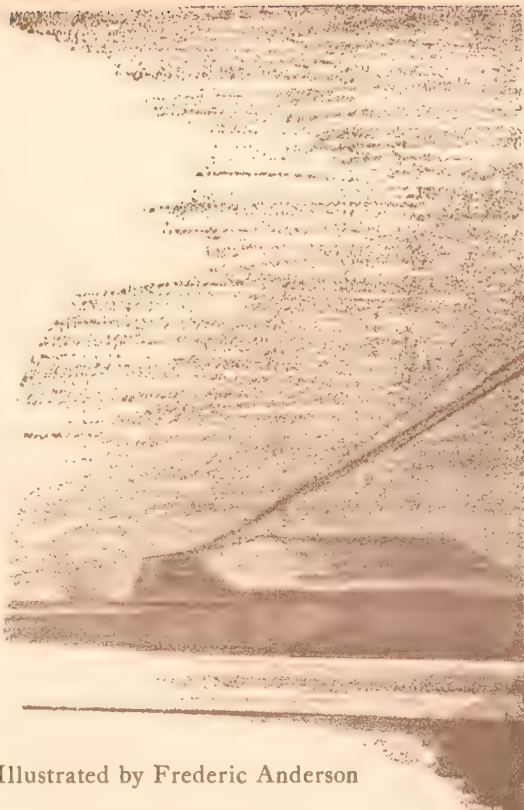
"What the hell good would it do anyone for me to catch a cold?" he addressed the darkness indignantly. "And what can I tell those dames, when they don't even talk English? Give them a laugh with my Norwegian? This aint the time. And I'm bad luck. Even poor Dutch got into a jam, knowing me. Nothing happens in Norway for a hundred years. I come around, and in a few months all hell breaks loose. I bring out that Wild Hunt that Ole talks about. Soon as I am anywhere, it's boots-and-saddles for the ghost gang.

"What the hell—I'm crazy. They had the Civil War before I was born, and the French Revolution and those Roman shows. Wonder what that bird Tattenbach will say in the morning—I wonder if I'll even get to see him. They'll have those torpedoes up here, looking for blood, and I'll probably be the only thing around with pants on. When a Heinie stops being comedy, he's bad news. Shows what life's like, all right: here's Ole—doesn't play the nags, saves his money. And something happens, and he has to lose everything. . . . Reminds me of that old guy one night in Detroit, who— Who's there?"

Mrs. Skougaard was at the door, and started to speak volubly. It never was quite certain to Jack whether she imagined herself speaking English or not. But he did understand that Harold was back, that there was trouble, and that he was needed. He dressed over his pajamas and followed her. She crossed the yard and headed for the barn in which the gymnasium was located. The night was dark and windy; the light from the storm lantern threw a weird, fluttering shadow of her skirts against fences and walls.

Harold met him, and at first Jack believed he was hurt. He was in his shirt, sleeves rolled up, and his hands were bloody. He tried to stop Jack, but the American had a dreadful premonition of evil, and ran across the barn to the shower-room beyond the partition. He stumbled on metal basins, which clattered and spilled pinkish water over the slate flooring.

Olaf was stretched on the massage-table, stripped to the waist. His left arm was swathed in bandages; the dressing on the hand was the size of a football. The limb had been



Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

strapped to the torso with broad adhesive tape. Another workman from the farm stood looking down sadly at him.

"Olaf—" Jack said, hoarsely. "Olaf, you fool—"

The youth opened his eyes, recognized Jack and smiled broadly. He extended his good hand, and started to speak. Harold translated: "Says he's glad he didn't hurt you much. He was worried. Says please excuse him, but he was in a great hurry."

"Yeah, sure—in a hurry to have that done to him!" Jack shouted savagely. "To put himself on the bum for life! Is it bad, Ole, is it bad?"

"No, not very bad. I want to talk—" Harold led the way outside. "He understands English a lot, even if he can't speak much. So I could not say it was bad. It is bad."

"How bad?"

"This bad—" Harold extended his left arm, and made a chopping motion at the wrist. "The left hand must come off, I think. I make good first dressing. Some of the fingers have been blown off; the others are injured. He put his hand over the mouth of a pistol. . . . Good-by, boxing!"

"I knew it, I knew it!" Jack was weeping. "Ole, why in hell did you let him do it, why?"

"Why? I ask myself. He is brave, but he was trouble for all. He wanted to fight the Germans near to, and he crawled up to them and attacked. He hit them with the gun-butt, fighting in the dark, and he hurt several. But we had to go to help him." Harold placed his hands on Jack's shoulders, and shook him. "Stop that, Jack. I call you to talk seriously."

"What's the use? I'll never find one like him, never—"

"Oh, yes, yes," Harold grumbled. "But after thinking of business, you must think of life. They'll be here as soon as it's light enough. One of the men from here was hurt, and



Jack floundered, lost his footing completely. The boat had been poled nearer; now a huge hand closed on Jack's neck, and lifted him out bodily.

we could not get him away—grenade in legs. He will die soon, but they'll identify him. So I have to go away from here. They will seize the farm, maybe burn it, but they won't touch the women and children. They haven't, yet. If they did, then there would be massacre, they know. Not one man in four, but all men would fight them.

"I must take Olaf with me. If they found him wounded, they would have him shot. And for delicate work on wrist, it needs a good surgeon, not a cow-doctor like me." Harold propped up Jack's chin with his palm. "Now, Mr. Bush, don't feel so bad. We must fix things so *you* won't be shot."

"Oh, what the hell!" Jack shrugged, wiped his eyes.

"Oh, you say that; but when time comes, you're sorry! Now, you have a black eye and a swollen jaw. You tell the Germans you try to stop us. They will put soldiers up here anyway, so the farm cannot be used by us for a while, so it doesn't matter if you pretend to be friends and give information. You put your hands in the air when they come, and they question you.

"You say to them: 'Look what they did to me!' And you take them to the hiding-place for the rifles. There are cartridges left, and two guns. Then you tell them where our radio is."

"Radio? I don't know where, Ole—"

"Radio to get news from the English, to give news to ships about what goes on—in the tank for shower Number Four. As soon as I get to a ship, I'll have a radio message sent ashore to a man who'll see the consulate and have inquiry for you at Laervik at once. By a diplomatic agent, over the telephone, so Captain Von Tattenbach can't pretend not to have been told you were American. For giving some information, the patrol officer will at least take you down for decision. You're safe, Jack."

"Looks good," Jack agreed. "What else shall I do?"

"That's all."

"Mean you've been thinking of me in all this, Ole?"

"I invited you to Norway."

"So you did. So you did." He hesitated: "And you—you'll go off with Olaf, to find the boat?"

"Yes. Not hard to find. We know where it is. They will wait until six o'clock. After that, they can't, because the planes will arrive soon."

"So—it's good-by!"

"Yes. I'll see you—after this is over. Now—" Harold flushed and concluded awkwardly: "I shouldn't do it, but I am going to see my kids sleeping. Maybe I can't see them again for some months."

Jack went in to see Olaf. The young man was sitting up on the table; his comrade had clothed him, buttoned the wounded arm inside. He grinned cheerfully at Jack and started to talk, in broken English and Norwegian. Jack gathered that he was telling him the story of his exploit. He must be in severe pain, must have lost a great deal of blood, the manager thought; yet he had plenty of vitality. The other man left them, to go and take leave of his family.

"I go England," Olaf said. "I haf machine—" He pretended to maneuver a joy-stick between his legs, moved his huge feet and imitated the sound of a plane motor: "Grrrrrrrr—"

"Sure, sure—that's swell—" Jack agreed.

He felt as if his blood was leaving him, like grain flowing from a bursted sack. With Olaf's departure, something was breaking. Then he suddenly knew the truth: he felt badly because he liked Olaf, loved him like a brother, like a son. And he saw that it was what had always been the matter with him—he had loved his bums. He had wished them well for themselves, not for himself. That was why he had been kicked around and betrayed. He never watched them—a guy doesn't worry about people he likes doing him dirty!

This minute, he would wish Olaf to have his left hand right again, even if somebody else handled him. One or two guys had understood him, he realized now: Ole, the thick Swede, and a little wop with whom he had toured Spain and North Africa. The others had been on the make, and had thought he was.

"A sap, just a sap," he thought. He threw an arm over Olaf's shoulder. He liked Olaf, who was just a crippled boy, who wasn't worth a dime to him any more. And Olaf uttered a great, chuckling laugh, hugged him with his sound arm, so hard as to leave him panting.

"Good boy, Olaf, you're a good boy!"

"You good boy too, Mr. Bush," Olaf said heartily.

HAROLD returned, with two quart bottles. One he uncorked and passed around; the other he placed in a little bag hung from his shoulder. The drink was bracing. Olaf stood up and walked back and forth, to show that he was strong enough for the trip. Harold and the other slung their rifles, ready to start. Then Skougard extended his hand to Jack.

"What's your hurry?" Jack said. "I'll tag along awhile."

He reached for Olaf's rifle, gathered the loose cartridges into his coat pocket, very deliberately.

"No," Harold stated. "You stay here."

"And I'm telling you I'm coming along, Ole." He backed away as the Norse stepped toward him, worked the block of the rifle. "As true as I'm standing here, Ole, if you try to paw me, I'll take a shot at you. I've taken all I want for one night. *Tak for mad!*"

"But we'll run into patrols, maybe, Jack."

"Sure. And then someone'll have to help Olaf, and someone'll have to do some shooting."

"Yes. But you cannot shoot at the Germans. You're a neutral."

"I'm not acting as an American citizen," Jack stated, "but as a private individual, at my own risk—"

"Then, if they shoot you, they'll be right."

"If they shoot me, I'd just as soon they were right."

"We have to take the bad trails down."

"I went hunting with you. Didn't I do all right?"

"Yes. You can come."

They walked out into the night. Not a light showed in the buildings. The women were probably peering into the darkness from the windows. But they were stoical:

there was not a hail, not a word. Harold was in the lead, followed by Olaf, with Jack behind and the workman closing the procession. Even in the light, moving about the flank of the cliff, save along the regular paths, was not easy. At night, it required the qualities of an owl and a mountain goat combined.

FOR long minutes no one spoke. The natives were sad, for they were abandoning homes and families, no one could know for how long. When there was a particularly steep stretch to descend, Harold, who never forgot anything needed, produced a length of thin, strong rope, which he fastened under Olaf's arms. Jack and Lars, the workman, would hold on, while Harold eased the wounded man down. Then Lars alone would hold the rope, and Jack would use it as a guideline.

"I'm glad it isn't light, Ole," he said, at one time. "This is tougher than I thought. I'd get dizzy."

Harold was discernible in the obscurity, his body moving as he re-coiled the rope. His slow, precise voice whispered: "Oh, the cliff itself is very high. But there is no point from which a man could fall more than a hundred meters at one time."

"It's great to know that," Jack admitted dryly.

They stopped for a few minutes at a *saetter-cabin*, a herder's hut, where the caretaker heated some coffee, supplied hardtack and cheese, and slices of salt pork. Harold examined Olaf's bandages by the light of his pocket-torch. They were stained with blood.

"Hurts, eh?" Jack asked, with an expressive grimace.

The boy shook his head, and forced a smile. But he could not eat much, and drank a lot of brandy. Jack knew what he was undergoing, the pain of a smashed hand when the numbness goes. When they started forth again, the sky was lighter above the crags. But the wind had shifted, and they were somewhat sheltered from its strength.

"North wind," Harold declared. "A good omen for Norwegians."

"Sure. We've got everything our way," Jack agreed sarcastically. He felt a familiar irritation, as he had formerly, when Ole had come to his corner between rounds, eyes closing, lips in shreds, asking: "I fix him that time, eh?"

Olaf started to mumble, to hum, incoherent words, snatches of songs. Jack knew that the fever had started. So did Harold, who lagged back often to support the young fellow. At times, going down an incline, he would literally shoulder him, over two hundred and ten pounds, with shoes and clothing.

"You're still as strong as two men, Ole," Jack praised him, during a pause for breath.

"That's nothing," Harold assured him. "Did you ever hear of Olaf Trygvesson? No? He was a Viking. There's a cliff called Hornelen, which you can still see, that nobody could climb. This Olaf, he came along, looked at it, and he said it was pie for him. So easy he was going to do it with his armor on. Well, they felt sorry for him, and they gave him a local guy to help him and be there when he broke his neck. What happened was, the local boy got dizzy, couldn't go up, couldn't go down. Olaf, he did not want to quit, he didn't want to leave him there. So he tucked him under one arm and hoisted him the rest of the way to the top." He rose to go, yawned audibly: "So, dis is not'ing for Ole."

This was an imitation of the dialect put into Ole's mouth by the sports-reporters. Jack knew that it meant he was growing tired. And he remembered what these three men had done inside twenty-four hours: a day's work on the farm, a march of several miles to fight with the Germans, clear their friends, and back to the farm, and this long, strenuous hike down the cliff. That legendary Olaf, whatever his name, had worthy descendants!

Fortunately they had reached an easier grade, a gentle slope tufted with brush and scattered spruce trees. Far above, the lips of the cliffs were edging with a faint rose

light. And around them the darkness was melting away rapidly; they strode through a fleecy, moist fog. The soil was stony, and Olaf knocked his toes on pebbles, stumbled often. Harold or Lars would walk on his good side, steady him. His skin was very hot to the touch, and he asked for a drink several times.

Then, just as day slid into the cañon of the fjord, they emerged on the brink of a high embankment, twenty-five or thirty feet, dropping at a steep angle to a fairly wide road following the shore. Beyond this road was a width of naked earth and sand, strewn with boulders and stunted bushes, then the water spreading afar in placid ripples.

Harold pulled a huge watch from a pocket, looked about, oriented himself. The shore-line curved out of sight around a bluff some distance to their left, while the road stretched straight for a few hundred yards on their right.

"We still have thirty minutes," Harold announced. "The boat is hidden up the creek on the other side of that hill. It is day, but I asked them to wait until six, and they will be waiting. Now we use the rope for Olaf; we get on the road, where walking is easy."

This was the moment Jack had been awaiting since the start.

"No, we don't, Ole."

"Why not? I'm in charge here, Jack."

"Yeah, you're doing the thinking. And you didn't take me in on any of this, when you should have known it was right down my alley. Now, if I wasn't here, you'd take the kid down on that road—and get him croaked, after all our trouble. I tell you that road is watched by the Heinies this minute."

Harold made a visible effort to control his impatience. "Jack, this is war, not fighting in a ring! I got information: The nearest German watch-post is two kilometers on the right, twelve soldiers. They do not move out far. The first motorcycle patrol leaves Laervik for this region at six-fifteen. Not due for almost an hour." He looked down at Jack, and the old rivalry flared. "Five dollars, I bet you!"

"Five bucks, right," Jack snapped his finger. "Listen, thick-head: I've watched you gum up things. I would have stayed up there if I hadn't known you'd disregard my advice. I got wise to something right away, which you didn't, wise guy—that if they knew where to ambush the guy with the cases last night, they were also tipped off to where that boat's hidden. And they know that stragglers will come down in the morning to catch her. So they planted a few guys down there to pop them off."

"I don't think so, Jack."

"You don't think, period. You say that launch is a British Navy boat? Then it has a machine-gun—"

"Two machine-guns, Jack."

"Two, all right. Never mind the caliber. Now, I go down and cross that road. If nothing happens, you come down and I owe you five bucks. If I'm shot at, you and the others follow the top of this ridge around the cliff and find the boat. She comes around this way, shooting. What you call a protective barrage, Ole. The Heinies take cover; I wade out and get picked up."

"No, Jack. You'd be killed."

"You tell me there's nobody there, and now you say I'll be killed. I won't. It never happened to me yet."

"I'll go with you, and Lars can help Olaf."

"You're too big and too slow, Ole. This is no job for a muscle guy. What's needed is speed and brains."

"Lars goes with you. Better still, we go around the bend up here all together and cross the road where it's—"

JACK lost his temper. This was Harold's old fault—arguing, wanting his way, thinking he was the only one able to size up a situation. Investing dough was one thing, getting out of tight spots was another.

"Shut up, Ole! Only one guy's needed to find out if they're around. They may have heard us coming down,

be watching, and follow. If they see me, they'll be busy. You can run Olaf across between you without getting him hurt some more. That's what we're trying to do, isn't it? Now, get out there and use your bean—I mean, I'm off!"

Jack left Harold no time for further protest. He hopped down, scrambled down the incline and landed in a heap in the grassy ditch. He gathered himself, checked the loading of his rifle, and walked out on the road. His heart was beating hard; the skin was tight over his skull—what people call their hair standing on end—but it was not an unpleasant sensation.

"Tack-tack-tack—tack-tack!"

The first impacts struck short, as he had expected they would. A good automatic rifleman aims at the feet, then corrects his aim by the spurting dirt. Jack bounded across that road like a hare, slid flat behind the boulder he had picked out in advance, just as the third burst, three shots, whizzed waist-high over the surface.

THE gunner sought him eagerly the next few seconds, and bullets smacked against stone. But Jack knew he was safe enough for the moment. He pushed forward to look for the gun. He saw nothing, really, but felt that the weapon lurked in the high yellowish grass at a point along the ditch, four hundred yards or so. He set the sights of his rifle at three hundred meters.

"I bet Ole's sore about that bet. Never won one yet."

He experienced the division of his thoughts that occurred in moments of stress and danger. That is, his eyes, his ears, were alert for signs of his enemies, but his brain dwelt on many things, as if they fitted on a screen in the back of his head. Ole and his pig-headedness; Bailey, the Texas sergeant who had taught him, and many others, the first principles of fighting.

"Yeah, sure," Jack mused, peering along his sights. "I remember Bailey. I can hear him say: 'Always reckon the Heinies are as smart as you, they know as much. They aint goin' to sit still and just wait.' He knew his onions. Now, what would he say? 'They'll wait and see if you're alone. Then they'll come and have a look-see.'"

And Jack waited. Bailey'd been killed. You can't out-smart a bullet. Of the others, how many were alive today, though they were all younger than he had been? He could think of only two. One had borrowed fifty cents from him at Saratoga; the other he had found running a beauty-parlor in a Midwestern city.

"Ah—ha!"

A helmeted head had popped into view, turned this way and that, ducked again, just like a rabbit getting the lay of the land. It reappeared again, close to the same spot, remained five seconds. The third time it lingered ten seconds. The fourth time the man was on his knees, and two other helmets showed up near by.

"Three—and two to work that automatic," Jack computed. "Five. That's about right. Twelve in that fixed post; the sergeant would keep as many with him as he'd send out. Five and seven—twelve. I might knock over one of them now, but the others would duck fast. Better wait."

The Germans were very wary. They had learned to distrust an open road, no matter how quiet. One of them suddenly darted across, vanished under cover. Jack became uneasy. This bird might crawl up on him from an angle he could not cover. His eyes swept the ground carefully; he saw with relief that there was a stretch of bare ground where he could not fail to spot the fellow in time.

In any case, the man reappeared, darted back to his comrades. He was luring a shot. There was a pause; then the Germans decided that the lone man they had seen was getting away down the road, and emerged, crouching, rifles forward. Three of them, nicely spaced. But Jack waited longer, and was rewarded: the man carrying the automatic and his aide heaved into view, trailing thirty yards behind the riflemen.

"That's more like it," Jack thought aloud.

He did not like that automatic. He laid his sights on the weapon, between the man's hands, which showed pink against his dark uniform. He had not fired at a human target for years, but he thought with some satisfaction that even if he did not hit the gun, he would probably strike the carrier in the stomach. Few joys compare with holding a good bead on a man who intends to kill you.

He took a slow, deep breath, let it out, squeezed the trigger. He snapped the breech-block open and shut, re-loading, fired again. The three men in the lead started, spread farther apart, looked at one another. They had heard the bullets, believed the sniper had missed.

Jack aimed at them now, waist-high, emptied the clip, reloaded, emptied the second clip, slid in the third. There were two men stretched on the road when he looked up again. The gunner was down, with his gun at his side. His helper had ducked without thinking of retrieving it. This delighted Jack. The damn' thing was not very dangerous against a man under good cover, as he was; but it sure made a run in the open awfully risky!

The gunner was moving, creeping, leaving a trail behind him in the dirt. Jack aimed at him, checked himself. Why kill the poor slob? He was out of this show, and he felt no hatred against him. Where were the others? He propped himself on one elbow, to look for a target. A missile lashed by his head, smote stone near by, whined mournfully into space.

Jack knew he was spotted, so he circled the boulder, rose and ran fifty yards to another. He was seen, for several shots followed him. He threw himself down, huddled behind the rock. He took a look at the road. Both wounded men had crawled to the ditch, but the automatic was where it had been dropped; and there was a helmet, too, to prove he had not been dreaming.

"Come on, come on," he muttered. "It's your turn this time."

Twenty-three years before, he had had to hunt down German snipers and machine-gunners. It had been tough work, much tougher than this, a lot of it in thick woods where a guy couldn't see what he was doing.

A helmet lifted; shoulders appeared. Before Jack could aim, there was a flash, and the screech of a bullet. Those fellows knew how to shoot. The light was getting better and better; the surroundings were losing that aspect of unreality which dawn cast on them. A helmet appeared—Jack fired at the same time. The bullet did not miss him by much. And he thought he had scored a hit.

"Two or three—what's the odds!" he thought.

He knew he was to die here. He had known it when he had left Harold. For several reasons: because he was unlucky, and had lost his last chance to make big dough. Because only a fool hoped to finish five men before being killed. Because he knew that the boat would not come for him. If the officer in charge had any sense, he would not jeopardize his crew and the Norwegian partisans to rescue a single man. Intelligent war is not fought that way.

Within five minutes, perhaps within ten seconds, one of those Heinies would aim right, and it would be over. He shot at a helmet, a bit too soon. He should have waited for the man to rise higher. The man he saw ducked, but one he did not see placed a slug four inches from his nose.

A SERIES of heavy detonations startled him.

He dodged behind the boulder—he had enough sense for that—and looked around: there was the launch, a long black boat not thirty yards from shore. The two machine-guns announced by Harold were firing, over his head, at the hiding-place of his enemies. Men were shouting for him to run.

He reached the water, plunged in waist-deep at the first leap. The cold gripped him, so that he lost his balance and floundered. He rose and waded on, half-choked, spitting water, then lost his footing completely. He had

never been a good swimmer, and he stupidly held on to the rifle. He sank, rose again. The boat had been poled nearer; now a huge hand closed on the nape of Jack's neck, and lifted him out bodily. He knew that powerful grip, and he relaxed.

"All right, there—" a voice shouted in English.

NEW explosions resounded, as motors were switched on. Jack lay on the deck, and Harold was heaping clothing over him. Then the neck of a bottle was inserted between his teeth, brandy poured down his throat. The machine-guns had ceased firing. A circle of faces loomed above, swaying against the sky.

"Who's in charge here?" Jack asked.

"I am. Why?" A young boy in uniform was bending over him, hands on his knees. He wore a peaked cap with a badge; there were three gold buttons on his cuffs, and not a hair on his lip.

"You English?"

"It's been rumored."

"And you're in charge?" Jack now understood why the boat had come for him, after all. Know nothing, fear nothing. "Well, those Heinies, knowing where this boat was, they'll have boats of their own watching for you at the outlet of this place."

"Indeed? I shouldn't worry too much, old man. They really have nothing here that will stand four-point-seven shells. Our barge's waiting for us. Destroyer, you know."

"You've got a destroyer in here?"

"Didn't think we'd come from Yarmouth in this launch, did you?"

"But the planes—"

"They've been provided for, never fear."

Jack was silenced by this superb confidence. Harold adjusted the coats around his neck and chest. "You can change into dry clothes soon, Jack. They have a surgeon on the destroyer who can take good care of Olaf. He is very sick now because of the fever. We did a good job for him, yes. I lose the bet: the Germans were there—"

"Five of them—"

"Did you hit some?"

"I'm sure of two, and maybe I got another one."

The British midshipman had been listening, for he turned and leaned close again. His smile was somewhat skeptical: "Good thing we arrived in time to save some of them, what? You were turning the show into a bloody massacre!"

"You can go ashore and check up on me, friend," Jack told him.

"I can't, really. Would need an Admiralty order and all that," the young man replied. He straightened sharply. "Hello! The old girl's in a nasty temper."

A continuous thudding roar rolled through the fjord. The boat lurched as her crew and the Norwegian partisans crowded to one side. A wall of water slid before Jack's eyes, green, blue, white, flecked with gold. Jack remained where he was, his curiosity dulled for some time. Probably the destroyer was clearing the way for her launch. Harold half-rose, then sat down again.

"Olaf, he will go to England as he wanted," he said, with a sad smile. "And you too."

"What about you?" Jack wondered.

"We leave the wounded on the ship. But tonight the rest of us go ashore again, somewhere down the coast. There is hard work for us to do in Norway yet."

Jack took another long drink.

"I'll go with you, Ole."

"No. You cannot come. You are not Norwegian."

"You need someone to manage you, Ole. I'm going with you. It's all right—didn't you tell me yourself there was no more war in Norway?"

Harold laughed, tapped his friend's chin with his huge knuckles.

"Always kidding me, Jack. All right, you come and see."

Badlands Wolf

*A story of the
Dakota wild-folk*

by

BIGELOW
NEAL



UNDER the quiet starlit sky of a Dakota night little Tshe-sha sat bolt upright on a freshly shoveled pile of clay. His tiny uplifted nose resembled a pinch of soot. His eyes brimmed with tears, and his puppy teeth chattered.

That afternoon this yawning hole had been a home; now it was the open grave of a tragedy. When Tshe-sha last left the den it was a place of safety and warmth, a place where puppy wolves might roll and romp and chew each other's tails. Now it was no more than a burial-place for all those things so necessary to him, and he was left to struggle on alone against terrific odds.

From the day of his birth Tshe-sha had been a conspicuously incorrigible member of a normally unruly family. While his playmates were dividing their time between eating and sleeping, he—without any reason whatever—was carrying rabbit-bones from one side of the den to the other, then carrying them back again on a basis of the same logic. Also he was the first to scratch and dig holes, burrowing down into the ground until only the black tip of his tail waved erratically above the floor of the den. At first he dug merely for the pleasure in digging; later he used the holes to bury his rabbit-bones; but the burials usually proved temporary, for the next day he dug them up and buried them somewhere else. Having worn out or lost his choicest bones while his denmates were yet in the elementary stages of digging, he boldly climbed up the tunnel that led to the den.

On the first of these excursions he progressed no farther than the tunnel's mouth. There he stopped, blinking at the sunlight, awed by the scene before him. At his feet the ground fell

away over a precipitous cliff to the alkali floor of the cañon, where living creatures ran or darted from shelter to shelter. Cottontails hopped into sight and out again; hawks and eagles hung like monoplanes pinned against the sky or if a cottontail remained in the open too long, plunged downward with a whine of vibrating feathers.

Tshe-sha was safe enough, there at the mouth of the den, for a slab of rock guarded it from below, and creeping cedar trailed from above to conceal the entrance.

Eventually the insatiable inquisitiveness of the wolf got the upper hand, and he began to make short excursions along the ledge. As the days passed, the excursions grew longer, and today he had gone to the extreme limit of his range and had become so interested in the result of his exploration that he failed to return even when his mother passed hurriedly on her way to the den. Afterward there had come the noise of tramping feet, the clang of shovels and the voices of men. At that, he'd crawled into a rabbit-hole to crouch and listen; nor did he come forth until the voices had gone and night had come. Then he found only the yawning trench in the place that had been his home. . . .

As the baby wolf whimpered his troubles into the unresponsive air of night, he was perhaps the loneliest, most forsaken and, in spite of his warlike ancestry, the most defenseless creature in the Badlands. Nor was there another with so many enemies. Every member of the weasel family constituted a potential threat. Wildcats were constantly on the lookout for just such prey. Death might strike even from the air, for in daylight there were hawks and golden eagles,

while at night, great gray yellow-eyed owls maintained a constant watch for prey. And against this horde of enemies Tshe-sha had almost no defense. A mouse might hide under the fallen leaves of a cottonwood; but the puppy, awkward and conspicuous, could find no such refuge. Lastly there were washouts from which a puppy might never be able to scramble, and sink-holes, those apparently bottomless pits of mud from which there was no escape. Where burning lignite coal glowed white-hot beneath thin layers of clay, fiery pits awaited the feet of the unwary. But Tshe-sha knew little of the perils which surrounded him, and his whimpering came only from a fear of the unknown, and loneliness.

But after a time he broke off his sobbing. He had many things to think about beside danger and loneliness, and one of them was an increasing sensation of emptiness, for in escaping immediate death he had also missed his supper. Getting to his feet, he set out, following a shallow and winding trough cut into the clay by water and melting snow; and in spite of his sharp little claws, he slipped occasionally, making a portion of his descent backwards with all four feet digging into the clay. There were many pauses at sounds he did not understand. Once an antelope passed above him, loosening a cascade of clay; and he crouched against a cliff, whimpering in an agony of fear until it had passed. Farther down, an owl came hurtling out of the night; but a convenient clump of sage offered sanctuary, and the owl passed on with empty talons. Finally on a vein of crumbling lignite coal he lost his footing entirely and rolled end over end to the floor of the cañon.

Illustrations by
Frank Hoban



Now began a series of perils which were very real indeed. He came to the bleached skeleton of a deer; a few dried membranes still clung to the ribs, and the little fellow fell to gnawing with such gusto that he forgot his surroundings, until through an archway in the ribs he found himself gazing into the eyes of the most deadly killer of his size in all the wild. What the puppy knew about weasels was nothing at all, but instinct told him it was time to leave with speed.

This flight brought him to the bottom of a coulee where a white river of plum blossoms flowed down to the cañon and the air was heavy with their odor. Here a spring seeped from a vein of lignite and he drank long and deep of the cool water. Here too he found a rank growth of grass and buckbrush, into which he crawled as another owl flapped across the sky.

Fitfully he slept the remainder of the night, though startled into frequent wakefulness by the passage of birds and animals above him. But with daylight he was astir again, searching hungrily for food. In this he was fortunate in the versatility of his digestive organs; for grasshoppers clung to dew-drenched grass-blades, and crickets hid under mats of tangled vines. Later he added a small garter snake, two frogs and the contents of a kingbird's nest to his diet; and thus fortified, he set out again under cover of approaching night.

He traveled with his pointed ears erect, his nose quivering constantly as he sorted and catalogued the scents on the drifting air. In detouring a giant mushroom of rock-capped clay he came to a spot where the ground quivered beneath his feet, and he halted on the edge of a sinkhole. As the puppy gazed in alarm, a blister formed on the face of the pool under the pressure

of subterranean gases and broke with an awesome sputter. An ominous sigh escaped from the slimy depths, and the ground beneath his feet quivered anew in sympathy. He retreated hastily, but skirting the sinkhole to continue his journey, he halted abruptly. Escape cut off on three sides by the perpendicular base of the cliff, the sinkhole and the rock-capped monument, his only path to freedom was blocked by a spotted wildcat!

Although Tshe-sha had never before seen a mountain lynx, his forebears had battled them through all the centuries, and from somewhere along the line of heredity came a message telling him that he stood in the presence of a powerful and bloodthirsty foe.

And as the puppy retreated, the cat glided slowly forward, her white belly sliding on the alkali without seeming effort or sound. Within striking distance she stopped, the muscles under her spotted hide gathering like steel springs for the final leap. It was too much! Throwing up his head, Tshe-sha called with all his might for his mother. It was a broken call, but it went out on the night air, the unmistakable plea of a puppy for help.

THE cat hesitated, whether from surprise or curiosity, or desire to toy with her victim. At any rate she postponed her attack an instant too long, for as she again gathered her muscles for the assault, a gaunt gray form glided from behind the monument, and a coyote stood between the cat and her intended prey. With a single hiss of hate the spotted cat vanished in the shadows, while the coyote turned with a low whine of greeting to the trembling puppy.

What chance brought Mikasi, as the red men called her, within hearing of the puppy's cry of distress may remain a matter of conjecture; but the reason could be deduced: A bullet had

broken one of her hindlegs and she hobbled on the other three; she was so thin that her ribs showed in shadowy lines; somewhere among the hills a yawning trench and pile of clay were all that remained of another coyote home. Now she limped toward the little fellow with every appearance of tenderness and solicitude. Thrusting forward her nose, she began to lick the puppy's face—and then a sudden change came over her. Her eyes told her the puppy might be one of her missing family, but her nose had detected a difference. She knew now that this tiny clinging thing was a scion of a totally different race, and as she recoiled from the dreaded scent, a warning snarl burst from her throat. Then she too vanished among the shadows.

Tshe-sha was bitterly disappointed. He had detected a certain resemblance to his mother in the shaggy form. His nose against the ground, he set off on her trail. His hindlegs showed a decided tendency to outrun the front ones, thus frequently turning him end for end. But because the coyote was making no effort to get away and Tshe-sha was doing his level best, it was not long before he had closed up the gap between them. Overtaking her where she had stopped to rest, the puppy went literally wild with delight. Heedless of warning snarls, he leaped over her, crawled under her and circled about her, winding up his demonstrations of delight by throwing himself flat on his back under her nose and waving all four feet above his wiggling body so enthusiastically that he failed to notice when she left, and presently he found himself yelping on her trail again.

This time she led him a chase, but his nose was good and his heart was strong; and at last he found her sitting on the top of a scoria-tipped butte with her nose pointed toward the sky. Almost out of breath, for a time he contented himself with sitting beside her and letting his tongue hang out while he panted himself back to normal breathing.

Meanwhile he kept his gaze fixed upon her in wonder, for Mikasi was singing—short staccato yelps, breaking into moans, rose and fell among the hills like the anguished cry of a damned soul. It reacted upon the puppy's spirits like the toll of a funeral bell, and he not only forgot to pant but he picked out a fair-sized star and began to warble his own version of life and its woe. It attracted the attention of the old coyote; breaking off, she lowered her head and sniffed at the little fellow beside her. Perhaps she had come to feel a certain kinship in their sorrow—for as she got to her feet and moved down the face of the peak, she offered no objection when the puppy scrambled bravely beside her.

It was evident that Mikasi knew the Badlands. Frequently she paused to search the gloom before her for signs of mice and cottontails. Occasionally she reverted to a typical coyote strategy, throwing her head up until she stood erect, to gain a momentary view of obstructions ahead. Once she leaped—and dropped on the back of a cottontail.

Tshe-sha was much interested in the procedure, and became more so when he saw the dead rabbit. Without any formality he grabbed the body of the cottontail and pulled it away from the coyote. The older animal bared her fangs and moved as if to strike, but Tshe-sha kept steadily with the business at hand, and presently the coyote sat down with a sigh of resignation until the little fellow had made away with her intended supper. Afterward she cleaned up the bones that were too hard for puppy jaws.

This act of sacrifice had a curious effect on the coyote's attitude, illustrated a little farther on, when Tshe-sha fell into a washout. Frantically he tried to scale its walls, but the crumbling clay and alkali did not hold his claws. As he grew tired, he broke into tiny yelps of fear, but a shaggy head appeared against the stars and white fangs reached down to grasp him gently. Once again on the level when he sought to prove his gratitude by chewing the tail of his rescuer, she did not attempt to punish him. Farther on, probably because he had eaten too much of the rabbit, he lay down and went to sleep. At that she carried him into a thornapple thicket, curled herself around him and threw a protecting paw across his sleeping form.

The sun had warmed the air in the coulee when Mikasi roused her sleeping charge and led him upward, through thickets and undergrowths of plum blossoms, to a spring. There they drank, and afterward the little fellow curled up in the sunshine while the coyote searched the grass-blades for grasshoppers and crickets. When these were exhausted, she finished her meal on mint leaves and grass. Then she woke the puppy and led him on up near the crest of the butte to a ledge matted deep with aromatic cedar, and there they slept throughout the day.

Tshe-sha awoke and explored the vicinity while shadows had yet to climb the western slopes. The coyote might have slept longer had not the puppy returned in a playful mood, and when licking her ears and nose and feet brought no gratifying results, resorted to a course that never failed. At that Mikasi got up, yawned and sat down again, this time on the much-chewed tail, and began a detailed scrutiny of her surroundings. Then they were away again, descending as they had come under the canopy of blossoms.

That night marked the beginning of the real relationship between Mikasi and Tshe-sha as mother and son. Heretofore it had been but grudging toleration on the part of the coyote.

ONE morning they were passing through a valley cluttered with geologic monuments; and Mikasi was hurrying, for their success in finding food had not been great. Daylight was approaching and jagged piles of thunderheads were rolling in toward the Badlands. Flickering lights had been playing among the peaks, and now the earth was beginning to tremble with the thunder among the hills.

A fallen cottonwood loomed ahead, its branches and unearthed roots interlaced. The ground beneath its rotting bark offered a favorable hunting place for mice, but Mikasi, having no time to waste on prey so small, gave it only a casual glance. This lack of caution nearly proved fatal, for as she approached, something stirred and moved on top of the fallen tree. Tshe-sha noticed the menacing thing with its softly glowing eyes, that crouched among the upturned roots. Its eyes reminded him of his adventure by the sinkhole, and he stopped abruptly with a tiny snarl. At that the coyote halted, to realize that she had blundered into the presence of the most dangerous foe in all the Badlands, the mountain lion Immu-tanka.

Under ordinary circumstances Mikasi would have little fear of the monstrous cat, for on the open ground she could easily outdistance it. But with a crippled leg this was not easy—and the puppy at her heels would stand no chance whatever. Torn between the instinct to flee and her responsibility toward her adopted son, she hesitated.

That moment of indecision might well have been her last, for the long bronze body of the tawny cat was flowing smoothly as drifting mist over

the trunk of the tree. Had the lion leaped then, nothing could have saved either the coyote or the puppy. But as the cat gathered herself to spring, a dazzling light spread across the heavens, a terrific crash sounded directly overhead, and while all three actors in the scene crouched in fear of the blinding glare, a gray wall of driving water swept down and engulfed them. And because there was nothing on earth that Immu-tanka detested so much as water, the lives of the travelers were saved. The lion slid from her perch to disappear with long bounding leaps toward some haven of refuge.

No sooner had the lion gone than the coyote instinctively changed her course and sought higher ground. It was a wild and fearful scramble for the puppy. The gray slopes of the Badlands had turned to grease. Everywhere water ran in sheets; the force of the wind was terrific, and the incessant glare of lightning was followed by awe-inspiring crashes in rapid succession. But in spite of it all, the puppy struggled upward until finally they emerged on a scoria-strewn platform. Here, cleverly hidden behind a clump of sage, was the mouth of an abandoned den, and in a moment they were deep within the heart of the butte. . . .

During the nights which followed, Tshe-sha's education progressed rapidly. The meeting with the lion had intensified his impression of possible danger, and he remembered to stop when the old coyote stopped, to sniff the air and listen when she sniffed and listened; to drop flat on his little stomach when she crouched; and sometimes, when Mikasi sniffed the air and changed her course, Tshe-sha also came to recognize the scent of the dreaded lion, and he padded silently away in the trail of his guardian, tiny fangs gleaming bright in the night.

Mikasi taught him many things. He learned to pounce on mice with rapid-



ity and with a delicacy of touch which prevented their escape, yet gave them no opportunity to bite his tongue. He learned to find the nests of prairie chicken in the taller grasses. One time he spent the better part of a night trying to extract the edible portion of a mud turtle from its shell. On that occasion he labored so long and so ardently that he finally went to sleep on the job. When he awoke the mud turtle was gone.

By midsummer Tshe-sha stood well up against the coyote's shoulders, and now he was pitting his wits against the speed of cottontails and jackrabbits. By fall he was nearly as large as she, and then a change took place, for, not altogether unlike a baby chicken, he began to molt. When he wasn't scratching himself, he was rolling on the ground or rubbing against a tree. The hair on his neck and shoulders came in a glittering bronze, growing longer and longer until it hung down in a magnificent mane.

Mikasi had never seen anything like him, but the relationship of mother and son remained unchanged. Tshe-sha was still a puppy at heart, and there were yet many things to learn. With the coming of deep snows they traveled by day as well as by night. On moonlight nights he sat beside her on drifted snow and they sang together.

Were it not for their constant fear of the mountain lion there would have been little to mar their care-free life. There was plenty of game, and since Tshe-sha had developed strength and endurance, the securing of food was a matter of routine. But wherever they went, whatever the time of day or night, there was always that dread of ambush.

ONE night when a sudden shift in the wind sent them almost into the lion's ambush, Tshe-sha took the lead for the first time, and led his foster mother far to the north and east, leaving the Badlands behind and reaching the timber along the Missouri River. There they remained while the one-time awkward puppy grew into that which his Maker had intended him to be. They might have remained even longer had not homesickness eventually swayed the better judgment of Mikasi. She had never become accustomed to the timber, nor to the open prairie, and one night a breeze came from the Badlands carrying the scent of cedar and bringing memories of home.

Mikasi got to her feet and whined. She licked Tshe-sha's ears, whining again, then turned slowly away. Several times she paused and called, but he was gazing out across the river, seemingly indifferent. When the scent of the cedars came again, she called once more; and still receiving no an-

swer, she limped slowly away toward the Badlands alone.

All night the old coyote held steadily to her course. By dawn she was exhausted, and secreted herself in a thicket for the day. At night, driven forward by the same scents and sounds of the land that had been her home, she pushed forward steadily, disregarding her hunger until at last she came to the valley of the sinkhole and to the spot where once she had saved the life of the puppy. The glow of moonlight filled the valley as she came limping over the clay. Hobbling forward, she thrust her nose down into the water by the sinkhole so thirstily that the pattering of her tongue deadened the sensitiveness of her ears; and when she turned from the spring, it was to find herself cornered beyond all hope of escape. For there, on that narrow strip of alkali which led to safety, with lips drawn back to expose saber-like teeth, with tail lashing, with her great tawny body crouched to spring, lay Immutanka the mountain lion.

The old coyote was defenseless.

Immutanka was creeping slowly forward, delaying her final charge only to watch the anguish of her prey. Fiendish in her cunning and cruelty, the lion turned her head in seeming carelessness from side to side as if to open some chance of escape to the unlucky coyote. In doing so her glance shifted to the base of the mushroom rock. And instantly she was motionless, gazing in hatred and newborn fear—for standing there broadside to the moonlight was the most formidable creature Immutanka had ever seen.

He had been following closely on the trail of the crippled coyote, and would have overtaken her long ago had he not loitered to hunt and sleep.

Tshe-sha, the helpless puppy, had become a lobo—a "loafer" or buffalo wolf. In his dress of flaming red, broken only by the black-tipped nose and tail and the glittering bronze of his mane, he was a terrible or a magnificent sight, depending upon the point of view. His head hung low; his fangs gleamed white. Now he too was moving slowly and silently forward, coming on until he stood in front of the coyote.

When Mikasi realized that her call had been answered, she whined and hobbled forward until she stood beside him. He towered above her, as she had towered above him the night she had saved him from the wildcat. Dropping his shaggy head, the red wolf thrust his nose under the coyote's hair and took a deep breath. Satisfied that it was she, he turned to face the crouching lion.

The odds were a matter of question, for the antagonists and their tactics were widely different. Immutanka

weighed perhaps a hundred pounds, the buffalo wolf nearly fifty more. The cat was lithe, sinewy; she was endowed with the most deadly teeth and claws known to the American wild. Tshe-sha, although equally strong, would depend mainly upon the crushing power of his jaws; but there was another factor, and that lay in the intelligence behind the glittering eyes of the wolf. Where the cat fought fiercely, with all the weapons she had, the wolf would fight craftily, methodically, using his brain.

IMMUTANKA took the air with a spitting hiss. She came down, spread-eagled, with crushing force. But Tshe-sha was not there. Again the great cat leaped, and again the red wolf was gone, but this time he left as a warning the hard metallic click of fangs that had barely missed her throat. A third time the lion leaped to the assault, and again she missed; but now the wolf was in and out with a speed as great as her own, and his fangs had struck home. When the cat threw herself on her back to ward off the assault, the white of her throat was turning slowly red.

Long ago Tshe-sha had learned that the defensive tactics of a wildcat were unbeatable. On her back, with all four feet in action, she could tear him to ribbons. Accordingly he leaped across her and turned to strike at her head. This maneuver brought her upright, and again the red wolf passed above her, burying his fangs in her back as he went.

The lion threw caution to the wind. Spitting, snarling, she sprang at her foe with such terrific speed that there was no chance for a counter-attack, and he escaped her furious assault only at the expense of a deep wound in his shoulder. And now as they crouched facing each other, crimson bloomed on the alkali beneath them both.

Again Immutanka rushed; but now, darting aside to avoid her deadly claws, the wolf came back with the first genuine assault of his own, driving his teeth again and again into her back and on through the muscles of her neck until they all but crushed the spinal column. Blinded by blood, crazed by pain and anger, the cat reared to her hind feet—a fatal mistake, for the red wolf saw the unprotected belly and leaped forward. Upreared on the edge of the sinkhole, the red wolf's impact toppled her backward. In midair, realizing her danger, she screamed, but she could not regain her balance. The sputtering mud on the face of the sinkhole opened and closed; a column of air-bubbles streamed to the surface, and a long-drawn sigh escaped from the subterranean pit. . . . Mikasi came from the shadows to lick the wounds of her defender. The red wolf's debt was paid.

"A good German, pardon me if I repeat it ten times, is no longer a German."
—Nietzsche

THE world outside Germany has a fixed idea of what a Prussian general should look like, close-cropped hair, tight-fitting uniform, rigid bearing.

But Grandfather looked nothing like that, and yet he was a Prussian general just the same. He stood well over six feet, and was so thin that his long tunic was all wrinkles. His snow-white hair came out in flowing curls from under his helmet; it reminded me of the quite improbable pictures of angels I had seen. Nor did he have a military voice; his speech was gentle, high-pitched, oddly hoarse. At Châlons in the War of 1870 a missile from a French chassepot had pierced his throat. His old orderly, who was still his manservant, often told me of giving the wounded young Lieutenant wine from a bottle, and seeing the wine trickle out of his punctured gullet.

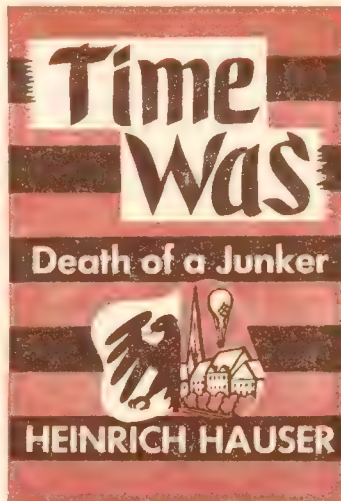
I liked to go walking with Grandfather in the streets of Berlin, through the Tiergarten and the Brandenburg Gate; all the soldiers and all the officers saluted, and the sentry at the Brandenburg Gate would present arms. Then the old General's blue eyes would flash, his long right hand with its thick, blue veins would rise, twitching queerly, to his helmet, and I was proud. I was a boy of ten.

One day Grandfather took me to the Tempelhofer Feld, the great drill-ground of the Berlin regiments. We were to witness a spectacle that even Grandfather had never seen: the ascent of a dirigible airship, invented by Major von Parseval. It must have been 1911—a glorious summer day. . . .

The Tempelhofer Feld, flat as a plate, was at that time merely fringed on two sides with a sprinkling of low, white houses. The sod was gray and yellow, trampled by countless hobnailed military boots. All through the summer the sandy ground was faintly redolent of horse, boot-grease, and all the soldierly sweat that was shed here.

Over the middle of the field, chained to earth by countless ropes, a huge silver cigar hung in air: the dirigible airship. Drawn by the strange spell of a thing perfectly new, we hurried toward it as if the great bird had lent us wings. . . .

Next to the airship stood two drays pulled by heavy artillery horses, and laden with long steel cylinders, from which the gas hissed into the tubing that connected the bottles, like a navel-cord, to the belly of the airship. A company of guardsmen in summer uniform—white trousers and blue jackets—held the ropes that anchored the air-



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ship. A young cavalry captain in the uniform of the Death's Head Hussars hurried toward the general, with little puffs of dust chasing the spurs on his patent-leather riding boots. He snapped to attention, his hand to his tall shako, the silver lacing of the Hussar's tunic standing out from his chest like ribs, his face red with the heat. He barked a few swift military phrases at Grandfather, more or less putting the whole great occasion at his disposal, and bustled off. . . .

The gondola, touching the ground on an acute triangle of aluminum rods, was like a balcony. It was open, surrounded by aluminum gratings, and full of weird machinery. Fat drums, fuel tanks pointed at both ends, hung in the rigging. From the gasoline motor on the floor of the gondola, drive belts went up right and left to the two propellers.

Sandbags hung under the gondola of the airship, and the soldiers tied on more and more of them as the gas continued to stream through the tube.

The field was closed off; there were few civilians present. In some scattered open automobiles, high-built and gleaming with brass, sat ladies in white dresses, their big flower-decked hats held on by veils knotted under the chin.

Now four men clambered into the gondola—three soldiers and a young officer. They detached the gas-tube

from the valve, manipulated ropes, and hung strange instruments like Christmas-tree ornaments in the rigging—"Barometers, barographs," as Grandfather said. But I didn't know what that meant.

Loud shouts of command. A dozen soldiers raised the gondola from the ground—it was astonishing how easily it lifted—and the hundred men holding the ropes began to march across the field, towing the airship. They looked like a column of ants dragging a dead lizard.

Two hundred yards from the group of spectators they stopped. More shouted commands. The motor in the gondola began to bark. Ropes were cast off; they shot like snakes from the sky and slapped down on the field. Streams of yellow sand poured down from the flanks of the gondola as it started to go up; the soldiers, reaching high, clung to the rods of the landing-spur. The young officer in the gondola shouted something, and the hands let go. Only two soldiers suddenly rose above the heads of the others like leaping fish, their white-trousered legs kicking before they let go and flopped to the ground.

The dirigible was afloat in the hot, quivering summer air, tentatively moving the kite wings of her steering-gear. Suddenly the drive belts began to twitch and sway; there was a swelling hum, a buzz like a threshing machine, and the propeller blades began to revolve. The young officer waved, and the ladies in the box-seat autos waved back with their lace handkerchiefs.

The hawk nose of the airship rose, and she traveled. She traveled through the air, actually moved, the way we had read about in the papers without quite believing it. The ladies in the automobiles applauded. Grandfather took off his helmet, and held it against his chest. His white curls blew, his lips moved, and he bowed his head a little as if he were praying in church. His big hand, rather tremulous by now, descended on my crown, and I could feel the strange, reverent, creeping sensation that his hand always gave me. I heard his hoarse voice, high like that of a boy my own age: "What you see there is something very great."

At the far end of the field the airship had described a sweeping curve, rather unsteadily, like a child learning to walk. Now she came toward us, seeming quite round, a fantastic silver ball in the Prussian-blue sky. For a matter of moments the gondola dangled toward us, and the ship passed over with her threshing-machine roar. Pigeons, scared up from the rooftops, flapped wildly across the blazing sun.

We had all turned to follow the ship with our eyes. She was now about

HIGH LIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

a hundred and fifty feet up, perhaps a third of a mile from us.

Then it happened. Violent activity among the four men in the gondola. The rat-tat of the motor died, and the belts dropped inexplicably from the drive-wheels of the propellers. A shooting flame darted up from the floor of the gondola, bright blue like day lightning, and the next moment the ship was in flames. It happened with such incredible speed that I felt as if I had not heard the shrill scream of horror from the ladies in the autos until long afterward. At that moment, frantic with terror, I must have carried out certain lightning-like instinctive actions; what they were, I only realized later.

The airship, one roaring mass of fire, hung quite still in the air. It was as if the heat of the flames were still giving her buoyancy. Then she fell, first slipping, finally in a swift plunge. I can hear the crash of that rending metal now.

From the corner of my eye I saw the soldiers, a broad fan of flying white trousers, racing toward the airship. Everybody ran—with incredible slowness despite their pounding legs, so it seemed to me. I felt myself picked up and snatched forward by an irresistible force. My legs dangled in the air, not reaching the ground; my hands clutched the belt of Grandfather's uniform. It was he who was sweeping me on. He was bound to, whether he would or no, because this was what I had done in my panic; I had opened one button of my jacket, and put the bottom button of Grandfather's tunic in my own buttonhole. It had been simply an instinct to unite myself as firmly as possible to Grandfather so that nothing could happen to me.

What came next I saw, shivering with horror, through the cracks between the long, thin fingers that the old General held protectively over my eyes. I have an impression that for some time it was impossible to approach the burning ship. The soldiers bounded at the blaze, holding their arms before their faces, and were hurled back again and again by the flames. At last they seemed to succeed: four long, twisting bundles were pulled out of the gondola and dragged across the sand. I did not understand that these were the men from the airship. They were black; they writhed like snakes; they uttered screams that no longer had anything human about them. I did not see much; horror as well as Grandfather's trembling hands closed my eyes.

But this much I did see. The cavalry captain with the silver death's head above his brow came striding across the field, very slowly, with measured tread. He walked up to the four long, squirming bundles. He stood before them with lowered head, a sharp, thin

silhouette against the curtain of fire. The soldiers to right and left of him fell back. A man in civilian dress who had been kneeling over the bundles half rose, shaking his head. The captain nodded. His right hand went to his belt, and then sank with a strange heaviness. It held a pistol. Stiffly, indeed clumsily, he pointed it almost straight downward. There was a breathless silence over the field, people stood frozen, with mouths agape. All one heard was the whimper of the dying, thin and animal-like against the dull roar of the flames. A sharp crack as of a whip cut the air. I saw something like a little cloud of dust puff from one of the bundles. A second. A third. A fourth. Then they were all dead.

The cavalry captain now stalked toward us, slowly, stiff-legged, with that same measured tread. As he came he thrust the smoking pistol back into its holster. The hand dropped from before my eyes, and I could feel the General standing up tall and stiff. He stood like a tree. Spurs jingled as the captain clicked his heels before him. The silver death's head glimmered palely, and beneath it was a second death's head, its very double. For the young officer's face was pale as death, peaked, with prominent cheekbones, and eyes sunk in deep sockets. From his twitching lips came a few words I did not understand, rattling, stuttering, abrupt, as if ground out with his last ounce of strength. Then the spurs jingled again, and he stalked off, stiff-legged, slow, tall and upright like a tree on legs.

I must have burst into wild, uncontrollable tears. I came to in a drowsy that was taking us off at a rapid trot. Grandfather sat stiff and upright beside me, his white curls fluttering, and I heard him say: "The Captain—your cousin—acted absolutely as befitted a soldier and a gentleman. It was the only thing to do—the only humane thing. You can put your mind at rest about that."

He said it with a wonderful inner calm and assurance. This was the first time that I felt the spirit of Prussia. I carried that experience with me for thirty years before its meaning became clear to me. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

The Beginning of Barbarism

FOR the first time in my life I am writing about "us," my family, the level of society in Germany that we belonged to. In writing about it I have made a strange discovery. I seem to be describing a most remarkable, hitherto unstudied animal, the Prussian Junker class. True, the "Junkers" stand for a definite concept in the mind of the democratic western world,

but nobody seems to attach any reasonable significance to the word. The mere name is like a red rag, provocative, infuriating; and fury makes men blind. . . .

My family had never greatly interested me before. But after 1933 the Nuremberg laws of the Third Reich made it necessary to exhume one's peacefully slumbering ancestors from the family vault, and scratch around at the mouldering bones lest there should be a drop of Jewish blood somewhere. This I did, with the help of the *Almanach de Gotha*, and then I made the discovery which accorded so well with all my early memories—the discovery that we were not so much a family as a tribe. . . .

On the second day of mobilization, with all Berlin echoing the unceasing march of troops and the unceasing rumble of transport trains going east and west, when all of us had shouted ourselves hoarse and were almost feverish with excitement, I saw our "tribe" together for the last time.

It was a sort of farewell celebration given by the old Admiral, the head of the family, at the Imperial Automobile Club. The gentlemen almost without exception were in uniform, even the very old officers, long since pensioned off. It was the peacetime uniform.

There were Cuirassier Guards with shining braid and breastplates weighing forty pounds which gave no protection against a modern bullet; Hussars with twelve-inch fur shakos that swelled up in the first rain like sponges, dripping dye over the wearer's face; Uhlans armed with lances that had been saved up against the World War out of the Middle Ages; infantrymen with gilded helmet-spikes, expressly made to offer the enemy a target. The officers let their swords trail.

Yes; that was how they went to war, to the "fresh, free, and high-spirited war." It seems like centuries ago.

There was partridge and champagne. There was spur-jingling, monocle-sparkling, and toasting of the Kaiser. And there was something quite uncanny besides. I did not know then what it was, but today I do know. It was the beginning of barbarism.

My mother, who was to me the gentlest and sweetest woman in the world, leaned over to the lady beside her and whispered her suspicion that Miss Evelyn, the governess, was an English spy.

I went hot and cold by turns, for Miss Evelyn was my first love. She had been with us for years, but only that very summer I had discovered she had golden hair, violet-blue eyes, a nightingale's voice, and all the other attributes of a first love. Miss Evelyn a spy? What an outrageous thought!

The other lady must have supported my mother's suspicion, for that eve-

ning Miss Evelyn was sent to bed early; her eyes were red, and my mother's voice was cold and haughty.

At that time we were living at the western edge of Berlin, on an estate along the Havel, almost encircled by the city. The following morning I went swimming with Miss Evelyn. . . .

We were resting on the bank when a whole troop of young people came running from the houses. At first I had no idea what was up, why they were howling and waving sticks; then I caught the words: "Catch her! Knock her dead! Spy!"

This release of primitive instinct burst utterly unexpectedly into the midst of my joyous intoxication at going swimming with Evelyn. I knew almost every single one of the boys, but there was no distinguishing individuals now. They faced us as a mass, figures with distorted faces; primitive man had come alive in them, the cave dweller seeking his prey; and they began to throw stones at the girl.

"Run!" I cried in English. "Run for your life!"

She ran. I tried to cover her, screaming in my ridiculous high-pitched boyish voice that they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Even as I did it I could feel what a silly figure I must be cutting—one small boy in a bathing suit against a crowd of rioters. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the girl running. She lost her bathing cap; her golden hair fluttered in the wind. She tore through a patch of nettles, and I could see her wince with pain. She stumbled in the furrows of the potato field, fell, and got her wet bathing suit covered with dirt. The crowd howled with delight. She ran like a hunted deer, on long slender legs, bounding across the furrows; I had never seen her so lovely. She reached the barbed wire fence of the park. I heard the rattle of the wire, and saw a long, blood-red mark shoot down her leg like a streak of lightning. The boughs of the hedge closed behind her. I heaved a sigh of relief; she was saved. . . .

By afternoon her trunks were packed, and she said good-by to my mother. The war with England was declared. . . .

Thus barbarism began in Europe.

CHAPTER FOUR

"The Men Detailed for Death"

FROM time to time even now, in the midst of the second World War, and three thousand miles away from Germany, I listen in to the German short-wave station. I don't listen for the news, nor for the music; I wait for the musical signature. . . .

I have just learned that the chimes are to be melted down, like all the bronze bells in Germany. They will be made into armaments. The song

of the bells from the Garrison Church of Potsdam will live only on the phonograph records at the Zeesen station.

It is too bad they must go; there was so much heart in the melody. It was simple and rustic; it warmed the spirit. It was the symbol of a Prussia that has gone to its death under Hitler. Another piece of the old Germany I knew has crumbled away.

This time we chanced to hear about it. Generally the crumbling of the old Germany is a noiseless process; you don't hear winter frosts cleaving the rotten stone of an old cliff. But already we can see it; we can see the great leveling that took place in the first seven years under Hitler.

This ceaseless crumbling of all cultural values, this crushing down of all native character—and individualism was the best, the most typical German growth—is the uncanniest occurrence seen in recent years. It is like the beginning of an ice age, like the grinding advance of a glacier across a whole country. It has rendered us strangers at home. It has finally brought things to the point where alien soil offered nourishment to the roots of our existence, while in our own soil we were bound to wither.

The bells of the Garrison Church at Potsdam have often sung me to sleep; Potsdam was always the first "cousins' stop" when we went to the country, far into the March of Brandenburg. . . .

Round about lived the Wends, a Slavic people. A quite different stock, they contrasted sharply with the landed proprietors, the estate officials, and the constables, the *Landjaeger*. They were a short, lean, tough race; even the men's beards grew sparsely, in the manner of the old Chinese. There seemed to be a special affinity between the Wends and the yellow sand of the March, the evergreen woods, the hidden lakes, the still canals along which they poled their flatboats. A primitive life, close to nature, abounding in superstition, almost pagan, flourished undisturbed under cover of the alders and poplars that hid the Wendish villages. . . .

How rich, how fabulously fantastic those years were to me! There was little thought of school, at least not in summer. Young people were put to work. There was a shortage of help; the men were at the front. These war years were fine because we boys had a responsibility such as had never been given to young people before. I led whole columns of village boys and girls; it was taken for granted that I should be a leader, because of course I belonged to the master caste. We gathered "leaf hay"—fodder for the army horses. We picked nettles; this was a newly invented textile material for uniforms. Standing deep in the water, we cut rushes, another textile for the city spinning mills. From the

sandy brook-beds we gathered shells for chicken feed. We sliced up turnips, and the slices were roasted as a coffee substitute.

Slowly I worked my way up to be a huntsman; hunting was very necessary, for the years of hunger were beginning. At first I had only a small-caliber rifle, barely adequate for rabbits and wild pigeons. Later the gun-rack was at my disposal, and I was practically responsible for the stomachs of a population on the estate numbering twenty-seven souls. The children gazed after me with hungry eyes when I went out into the woods early in the morning, accompanied by Witch, the shaggiest dog I ever knew. Game laws were suspended during the war. I shot everything edible that came within range. I slunk under the poplars where the crows nested, blasted their nests to pieces with shot, and brought home the young crows, which the maid turned into stew. Crows' eggs were also eaten; they had a pleasant taste. When I came home at night with a deer over my shoulder, proud and manly, the absent squire's pipe between my teeth, it meant a banquet for the whole place. If there was nothing else at all, I provided the ladies of the manor house with dainty little dinners of sparrows. You could bring down a dozen at a crack with fine shot. If there was bacon to wrap them in before roasting, they made excellent eating. . . .

I cannot say that we were in great distress. Poor as the Brandenburg soil was, we still managed to live fairly well on the produce of the land. In the spring there was an abundance of crabs in the countless inlets; the village boys caught them at night with lanterns. There was fishing in the ponds, and we endeared ourselves to innumerable relatives and friends with eels sent by parcel post. We shipped the eels alive and in an intoxicated condition, so that they would keep still. This was done by putting a rag soaked in potato brandy in their mouths as a gag.

Thus, isolated from the great cities, and not actually touched by acute distress, I was quite able during my boyhood to preserve my illusions about the war. . . .

It was the spring of 1918; I volunteered for the navy.

"Men detailed for death, fall in! Corridor A!" Noncommissioned officers bellowed into the echoing cement casemates of the barracks. Doors banged open and shut, naked gas flames flickered; over all hung an evil smell of fish-oil soap, calcium chloride, stale sweat, and beer. The recruits, undressed and shivering, crowded into the long hallway. . . .

The examination, even mine for the navy, took place in a big industrial city. It was the spring of 1918; at the

front the last great hecatombs were being burned in the final, desperate offensive. At home the last reserves of human material, already seven times sifted and culled, were being combed over once more. "Anybody that doesn't come in with his head under his arm gets taken," the recruits whispered. The scene was filled with a wild, unconcealed cynicism. The noncommissioned officers regarded the "material" sneeringly, with open, hard disdain in their eyes. Their feelings were understandable: never before or since have I seen such a downtrodden mass of humanity. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

The War That Fathered Us

WHEN Ludendorff's final attempt to break the deadlock on the Western Front had failed, and the March and June offensives had devoured their last incalculable blood sacrifices, we naval cadets were sent to Flanders, in September of 1918. We put on field-gray overalls over our blue uniforms, and the old warriors, seeing this battalion of children marching to the station, shouted derisively, "Germany's last hope—you're the people we've been waiting for."

As I said before, I am not going to talk here about our war. Its only significance is that of a turning point toward the roaring plunge into universal barbarism. What follows is simply an example of how we boys took cover behind wild cynicism in order to survive, an example of how the iron rings were forged about our hearts lest they should burst.

It was at Oudenaarde, during one of the last counterattacks that covered the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. We had cleared out an English trench with flame throwers and hand grenades. A boy scarcely older than I came crawling out of his dugout; and I was barely seventeen. When he handed over his pistol, he smiled. He felt safe. He could see by my face that he was not to be killed. He thought the war was over for him. He had narrow boots, delicate hands, and a gold cigarette case. He was my first prisoner; I was proud of him, and so I regarded him as my private property. One makes friends quickly in such situations.

First Lieutenant von S., our company commander, came along the trench, limping from the wound he had got at Cambrai. Next to Wrede he was the one man whom I worshiped almost like a god, for he possessed what I never have attained and never shall attain—absolute physical fearlessness. He nodded with odd abstraction at my report. He did not look at the prisoner. He looked past him or through him, as if he did not exist.

And just in passing, as it were, he raised his pistol and shot the English boy down.

That evening we were in our billets. I date my last piece of quixotry from that night. We were quartered in the village school; the Lieutenant lived at the neighboring farmhouse. When I went over he was already in bed. It was an old-fashioned bed with curtains, and the Lieutenant had put on an old-fashioned peasant's nightshirt that he had found in it; he looked ridiculous. But the ridiculousness of my own situation was greater, and I could feel it as I snapped rigidly to attention before the bed in my service uniform, wearing my steel helmet, and spoke my carefully rehearsed piece: "Lieutenant, sir, you shot my prisoner. Lieutenant, sir, I hereby demand satisfaction."

The curtains flew back with a jerk. The company commander sat up in bed, a grotesque spectacle with the lace collar about his scrawny neck. His bare feet dangled over the edge of the bed, and he stared at me, blinking, snatched from slumber. Quite calmly, indeed with unusual amiability, he summoned me closer: "Come on over here."

I did so, clicked my heels, and stood there rigid, in true Prussian style, but with sinking heart, feeling how unreal it all was.

"Sit down."

There was nowhere to sit but on the bed. I perched on the edge; I was physically and morally crushed, utterly helpless and embarrassed. The Lieutenant reached under the bed. He fetched out a brandy bottle and a soldier's drinking cup. He filled the cup: "Have a drink."

I drank. He took a long pull himself. He filled the cup again. He was still talking sleepily, but there was a great deal of irony in his red, blinking eyes. I could feel myself blushing. The company commander pulled the blankets around his shoulders; he was cold.

"The General," he said in his rusty, sleep-sodden voice, "—you know the General—well, the General gave orders before the attack, 'Don't go taking any prisoners.'"

He raised the cup to his mouth, and gargled the brandy before he swallowed it: "Do you know why? Because we can't feed prisoners any more. Damn' rot-gut, that brandy. I sent you away when the orders were being issued. I did it because you're still young and much too soft. Hell's fire, you can't challenge me, Cadet. I've got more important things to do than to go fighting with young bantam cocks. Besides, I'm too good a shot for you. Here's how!"

He handed me the cup. I drank in great gulps to hide my embarrassment. I felt myself abysmally disgraced as

never before in my life. The order to dismiss would have been an act of mercy, but it did not come.

He stared at me under lids heavy with sleep, and his voice came as if from a dream: "Cadet, you should wear a monocle. There is a deeper meaning to monocles. You see if you blink an eye—as you are doing now—the monocle falls out . . . Cadet, you should wear a monocle . . . and learn . . . to control . . . your emotions . . ."

During these words the Lieutenant had sunk very slowly back into bed. The empty cup rattled on the floor. He was asleep.

I jumped up. I stood there, still in my ridiculous posture of attention, my hands at the stripes on my trousers, my head swimming with brandy, rage, and shame.

That was the end: the end of a humanity that might perhaps have been mine. . . .

In February of 1935 the Upper Bavarian mountains were buried deep in snow. The brisk wood fires in the tiled stoves of valley villages smoked like fleets of little steamboats. . . .

Into this winter idyll we burst with some two hundred passenger cars, as many motorcycles, over a hundred and fifty trucks, and press cars, radio cars, movie cars, baggage cars, gasoline trucks, and a post office on wheels—a small mechanized army, the competitors in the winter motor-vehicle race.

The whole Upper Bavarian mountain area had been chosen as a testing ground for the military qualities of the hundreds of different motor-vehicle types then existing in Germany. To us, the competitors, however, the military nature of our "cross-country sport" was quite unknown. Officially the three-day run was sponsored by DDAC (*Der Deutsche Automobil Club*), a civilian organization corresponding to the A.A.A. The Reichswehr was simply an invited guest, so to speak.

The hotels and inns of Egerndorftach were overcrowded with drivers clad in furs, leather jackets, and the most varied uniforms. There were private sportsmen and factory drivers, teams from the German Post Office, the Storm Troops, the NSKK (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrer Korps*—National Socialist Motor Drivers' Corps). There were teams from the Government Railways, the foreign automobile plants; the Reichswehr, and even the "Gentlemen of the Water Department," as the Navy was called.

We started off before dawn, under searchlights. People brushed the snow from the cars, which all had to stand outdoors overnight. Starters painfully turned over frozen motors, backfires echoed across the fields, tires pulled loose with a crunch from the coconut matting on which the cars had carefully been parked. Then the

starter's flag dropped before the gateway. Group after group roared off into the foggy twilight.

It was a wild, adventurous, magnificent drive. I shall have to describe cross-country sport in detail, for America knows nothing like it.

You drive over the very worst roads that a good car with a good driver can manage at all. Now and then you drive without any roads, up steep slopes, zigzagging among forest trees. You ford rivers, bogs, sand pits. You drive across the ice of frozen lakes and for miles along the stony beds of dried-up streams. In a word, everything is tried to break down the vehicle, to uncover its weak points.

The pleasantest thing about it is a surprisingly democratic element. Each group, consisting of three cars, can go pretty much as it pleases. You are simply handed an ordnance map. On this map are marked a series of control stations to be visited. But how this is done, in what order and by what route, is left to the drivers' judgment. Cross-country sport it was that trained the drivers of the Panzer divisions, and fixed the suitable types of vehicle for Hitler's motorized army.

I was, indeed we all were, strangely blind and obtuse not to have had any inkling of this purpose at the time.

To us it was a sport, the most strenuous and exciting sport I had ever known. Often you would push a wall of snow ahead of you until it towered over the hood, and then you had to shovel. You slid down steep mountain-pass roads with brakes smoking. You chopped holes in frozen brooks to fill up boiling radiators. Whole fences were pulled down and thrown in the road if the car could not make an abrupt pitch otherwise. You hauled each other up with ropes and block and tackle. You strayed in the wilderness, spun in circles on glare ice, and in the evening, if all went well, you came back like a wounded warrior from battle—snow-blind, your face peeling with sunburn, your wrists swollen, a few fingers frozen, the car with fenders dented or missing, headlights crushed, muffler torn off. Sometimes you wound up at a fashionable hotel, where you went dancing after a scalding hot bath; then again you were in some Godforsaken village pub where people slept in rows on straw. Our exhaustion was often so complete that I, for one, would make the strangest blunders. Once I associated the ideas of washing and going to sleep so thoroughly that I reeled to my cot with a washbasin full of water, and dumped it there.

We had exciting, hectic days

I have always loved machinery; the experimenting that was going on then delighted me, and I never dreamed it was all a false front for mechanization of the army. Cars with two-cycle

motors vied with four-cycle engines and Diesels. Some trucks had gas-generator tanks attached to the bodies, in which wood or coal was turned into gas. There were even steam cars. There were cars with the motor over the rear axle, and others with one motor before and one behind. There were motorcycles with skis at the sides for snow travel.

All the important automotive engineers were on hand, along with many officers and government officials. Field telephones were set up, and mobile repair shops. There were mechanical tests where you had to change tires or take apart and put together the carburetor. One man who attended every such occasion I supposed for years to be a woodsman; he was quite shabbily dressed, and wore a peasant cap. He was Dr. Porsche, the designer of the "People's Car," builder of tanks, holder of countless patents.

HOW naïve I was even then! During the second race, which was in East Prussia during the spring, I cried out in delight to my rider, a Reichswehr officer, "Look—the woods are all fringed with blue violets!"

The soldier laughed: "I think you're mistaken. Those are no violets, that's barbwire."

Another time, being still a journalist incidentally, I wrote an enthusiastic story on a new Reichswehr vehicle with caterpillar treads.

I had an immediate threatening letter from the Army Procurement Office in Berlin, saying I was to come at once and answer for myself.

"My God," a major snapped at me, "where have you been living—on the moon? Didn't you know that caterpillar vehicles are forbidden to the Reichswehr under the Versailles Treaty? Sir, if you are guilty of such stupidity again I shall court-martial you. Good day."

Along with the three annual big cross-country races—planned like army campaigns—in East Prussia, the Harz, and Bavaria, there were any number of automobile trips abroad. For instance there were the Balkan drives, which developed from the Monte Carlo Rally. They, the trips through Poland, the drives in North Africa with Mussolini as host, and the Austrian Alpine drives, had every one of them a military purpose; they explored roads, population, terrain, and prepared for future conquest. The astonishing thing, I cannot help repeating over and over, is that we ourselves, the competitors, never realized it at all.

But what fun we did have, we drivers from the American plant in Germany! And the best fun of all was to beat the Nazis at their own tricks. In all the races held by the NSKK, I wore a very old suit that hap-

pened to be the Nazi shade of brown. With upturned collar, and speaking in the gruff tone which distinguishes the true Storm Trooper, I often beat my way through barriers that baffled every civilian driver. We afterward equipped our factory drivers with overcoats copied from the military greatcoats of the Panzer divisions.

Our mechanics and repairmen loved the Nazis as little as we did. Whenever the Opel factory had to lend cars to the Storm Troops, you could be sure there was some trick to it. It was particularly popular to tie a herring on the exhaust pipe under the driver's seat, so that it would begin to stink frightfully after a few miles. Or the boys would fake terrible bearing trouble by hiding paper parcels of ball bearings in the hubcaps. Within a few miles the party would wear through, and the rattling balls, harmless though they were, gave every symptom of a ruined motor.

Major Huehnlein, the leader of the NSKK, and dictator of the cross-country races, had an automobile we called "the ship of the desert"—a giant six-wheeled Mercedes. It weighed something like three tons, but even so we lugged the car up the big front steps of the Casino at Baden-Baden one night.

We private drivers really had every reason to hate the NSKK. The SA and SS received private information before each race as to how they could best overcome the difficulties to be expected. They had secret repair shops, forbidden by the rules. If a high Nazi leader missed the road, they said afterward, "An SA Group Leader cannot go wrong," and his route was declared the only correct one.

The army hated and despised the NSKK quite as much as we did. No greater contrast was imaginable than the victory celebrations, with the three groups sitting strictly segregated at the horseshoe table—civilians, army, party. The young officers were slender, punctilious in their well-fitting uniforms, aloof and sober; next to them would be the Nazi table with its gross men whose bellies bulged out their brown shirts, fatty necks billowing over collars, noisy, boastful, and beastly drunk.

Once a decoration-covered Group Leader rasped at me: "Well, when is Opel going to build the People's Car, anyhow?" It had not then been decided to put up a special factory for Hitler's famous People's Car.

I replied in surprise, "Why, Group Leader, you don't need a People's Car—you never drive anything but your big Mercedes."

He winked at me slyly: "Sure, but when we party leaders go driving among the people, we'd rather show ourselves in a modest little People's Car."

The West Point Ring

Tiny David of the State Police takes a hand in an F.B.I. adventure.

by ROBERT R. MILL

A LARGE black sedan, making well over seventy miles an hour, flashed along a country road in northern New York. Ahead was a crossroads, and out from one corner rode two children, mounted upon bicycles. The driver of the sedan neither slowed down nor tooted his horn. A cloud of dust arose, and then parted to permit a fleeting glimpse of the rear of the speeding car, and also to reveal that the children by some lucky freak of chance, had escaped sudden death.

Back on the road passed by the sedan, Lieutenant Edward David, who was at the wheel of a car proceeding leisurely from Syracuse to the barracks of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, went into action.

There was a spirited chase, during which Lieutenant James Crosby, who was riding with Mr. David, made uncomplimentary remarks about his own driver. The rear car pulled alongside its quarry. The driver of the sedan tried to force the pursuing car off the road. Mr. David calmly closed in. Then the fleeing driver called it a day, and pulled to a stop.

Messrs. David and Crosby tumbled out, and confronted a short, stout, swarthy individual whose dark eyes gleamed with anger.

"You want to kill me, yes?" demanded the irate one.

"Don't accept his offer," advised Mr. Crosby, *sotto-voce*. "His head isn't worth mounting."

"I want you to drive at a decent rate of speed," said Mr. David. "It wasn't your fault that you didn't kill two children. And I'm too old to enjoy getting crowded off the road."

"Bah! I am in a hurry. I hurt nobody. It is important that I make speed. Here!"

He produced a card, which Tiny David proceeded to examine.

MR. HENRY ZOLUE, PRESIDENT
The Zolue Optical Company
Repput Lake, N. Y.

Mr. Crosby turned his attention to the card.

"I'll give this to my Aunt Agatha," he promised. "She wears bifocals."

Mr. Zolue nodded.

"I make fine optical goods, parts for range-finders, gunsights and bombing-sights. Big Government contracts, we

have. I come back from an important conference. You would block the defense program, yes?"

Mr. David prided himself upon knowing a liar when he saw one.

"I'll just delay it," he promised. "This afternoon, at three, you will call on Judge Chalmers, in Repput Lake. Wear a black tie. The charges will be reckless driving and resisting arrest."

Mr. Zolue spoke with heat in a language strange to Messrs. David and Crosby.

"If that means what I think it does," said Mr. Crosby, "little Hans should have his mouth washed out with soap."

A dull flush mounted Tiny's face.

"Get back there and take a statement from those kids," he ordered Crosby. "I'll take care of this gentleman."

"I'd set a rat-trap for him," Mr. Crosby called back over his shoulder.

Tiny David turned to the driver.

"I was giving you all the breaks. Now I'd like to hear an English version of what you said."

Mr. Zolue obliged with a free translation of idiom from his own language. It is unprintable. It is something that would cause any red-blooded man to double his fists. To it Mr. Zolue added other offerings, all obscene and profane.

Tiny David's hamlike open hand landed on Zolue's mouth with a resounding "*blorp!*" and acted as an effectual stopper.

"This afternoon at three," said the trooper. "Get going before I take you apart."

Zolue departed, vowing vengeance. In due time Mr. Crosby, who had been an interested spectator, returned to the car, and they started for the barracks.

"Never, never, never put your hands on a guy like that," warned Mr. Crosby. "It's against the rules. You know that. Couldn't you find a brick?"

Mr. David slouched behind the wheel, carefully distributing the length and breadth that had earned him the nickname of "Tiny."

"He rated it, but no good will come of this," he mourned. "I sure hope the Skipper enjoyed his eggs *à la* Filipino boy this morning."

At the barracks Captain Charles Field, commanding officer, greeted them with warmth that brought no joy to Tiny David's heart.

"Come in, gentlemen. Be seated. Have a cigar." He dodged an imaginary blow. "I'll be reasonable. You won't have to use your fists."

"Would the Captain care to hear my version of what happened?" asked Mr. David.

"No. I'll restrain my impatience until you tell it to a jury. Chief Bel-den, of the Repput Lake police, telephoned. The charge against you is assault. My big heart prompted me to obtain an adjournment. We may be able to keep you out of jail until the cool weather. There was the little matter of five hundred dollars for a bond. I arranged that. Don't thank me. If you skip out, I'll consider the money well spent."

Captain Field favored the other member of the team with his attention.

"There was no charge against Crosby, so I assume he was asleep at the time. It's the first time I have known you to miss any trouble. Too bad. But we can't have everything."

THE Captain consulted a slip of paper.

Mayor Bascord, of Repput Lake, also called. He has the signatures of the majority of his leading citizens on a petition asking that David be discharged forthwith, whatever that means. There was also a call from Assemblyman Craymote. He promised to bring the petition to the attention of the Governor. If this telephone business keeps up, you'll need a secretary. Not to mention a lawyer and a bail bondsman."

Captain Field's enjoyment was reflected on his face as he continued:

"When you feel the yen to slap somebody around, you certainly don't waste punches on small-fry. This bird Zolue is the world's greatest gift to the optical manufacturing business. Founded a regular industrial empire in Europe. Stuck it out until Hitler overran his country, and then managed to escape with most of his money, and most of his master workmen."

"If it please the Captain," Tiny interrupted, "how did he manage it?"

"I wouldn't know that," Captain Field admitted. "But I do know that he was just what the doctor ordered for the defense program. Knows a lot of secret processes, and controls im-

portant basic patents. Right now his Repput Lake plant is working on a new bomb-sight that revolutionizes night-bombing. It's hush-hush stuff. The Army farms out the different parts to various plants, and assembles them in a Government factory. Zolue is making the most important part. Has the only plant equipped for it."

Tiny David thought he saw a chance to delay the inevitable:

"If the Captain was Hitler, would he let that bird get away from him? And would he let him take his best workmen and his money with him?"

"I am not Hitler," Captain Field pointed out. "And don't let wishful thinking blind you to realities. I suspect the Repput Lake people did a bit of checking before they welcomed Mr. Zolue to their midst. I know the defense people did before they gave him a contract that adds up to three millions. There are other Federal agencies."

The more Tiny David considered what at first had been merely a shot in the dark, the better he liked it.

"If it please the Captain," he persisted, "all the Repput Lake gang saw was a chance to grab off a plant that would put plenty of money in the Main Street cash registers. The defense people have been swamped with orders for stuff needed right away, and have billions to buy it, but no plants capable of turning it out. They wouldn't be too hard-boiled with a guy who had the stuff, and who was willing to take their worries off their shoulders. The F.B.I. is so busy that they haven't—"

"All this," Captain Field interrupted, "is very interesting chit-chat. You have time for it. I don't. I"—he accented the pronoun—"I am one of the employed."

"Sir?" said Tiny David, determined to know the worst.

"Meaning," said the commanding officer, "that until this little matter of a charge of assault is cleared up, you are what show people call 'at liberty.' The technical name is 'suspended.' Take your choice, because you are the guy most concerned. It breaks my heart to do this, but I must consider my own future. Furthermore, I am entitled to some peace and quiet."

He turned to Mr. Crosby.

"To make that peace and quiet complete, I am assigning you to the Repput Lake sub-station. You won't be too popular, but I am not sending you there to qualify as Miss America."

A kindly impulse appeared to sweep over the Captain.

"You can't hang around here," he told Mr. David, "but after you turn in your uniform and equipment, I have no objection if you pal around with Crosby over in Repput Lake. Be handy when it comes time for your trial. But don't keep Crosby from his

work. And don't do anything to provoke Zolue. He's sore enough."

"Is that an order, sir?" asked Tiny David.

"You are one of the unemployed," said Captain Field. "They may not eat regularly, but they aren't subject to orders."

"Is it a suggestion, sir?"

Captain Field shrugged. "What do you think?"

Tiny David rose. "I think, sir, that I'll go to Repput Lake."

After they were gone, Captain Field pulled a letter from the drawer of his desk. The opening paragraphs contained much of the information regarding Zolue that Captain Field had outlined to the two troopers. The writer then raised some of the very questions cited by Tiny David.

The concluding paragraph read:

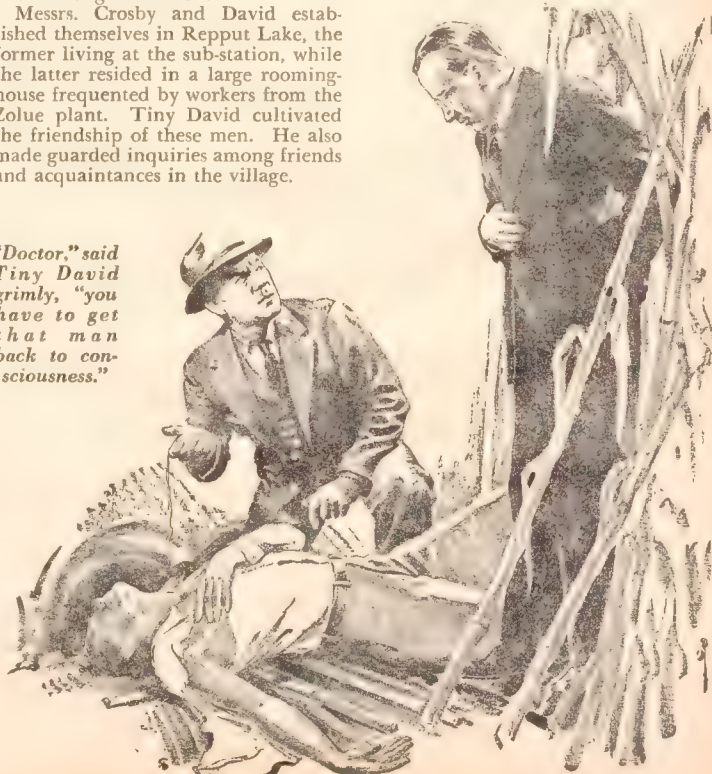
We are swamped with work. We will get to this case sooner or later, but I consider it urgent. Therefore will you please put one of your best men to work on it at once!

The letter was signed by a prominent official of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice.

Captain Field smiled complacently. He felt reasonably sure that Mr. Zolue and all his works would receive prompt and thorough attention.

Messrs. Crosby and David established themselves in Repput Lake, the former living at the sub-station, while the latter resided in a large rooming-house frequented by workers from the Zolue plant. Tiny David cultivated the friendship of these men. He also made guarded inquiries among friends and acquaintances in the village.

"Doctor," said Tiny David grimly, "you have to get that man back to consciousness."



The net result of all this was very little. The local residents, pleased by the sudden swing from poverty to prosperity, had only good words for Zolue. The workmen, mostly local youths who were undergoing training periods, had little enough use for Zolue and his foreign craftsmen in key positions throughout the plant; the best they could offer, however, was that Zolue had attempted to pay starvation wages, but the Labor Department stepped in and upped the scale.

All that, Tiny David admitted ruefully, did little to prove his suspicions, and it did nothing toward placing Zolue in a position where he could not cause trouble for a moment of indiscretion. The trooper, preparing to retire one evening, also reflected that days were turning into weeks, and his severance from the pay-roll was beginning to hurt.

HE was aroused by a knock on the door. "Telephone," said the slatternly daughter of the proprietor.

Tiny David groped his way down the dark hall and picked up the receiver. "Hello."

Crosby's voice answered: "I have a letter here."

Tiny David sighed. "I know. She is having a fine time, and wishes you were there."

"This," said Mr. Crosby, "is not that kind of a letter. Why don't you come over and see me sometime?"

"I'll be right over," Mr. David promised.

He found Mr. Crosby holding down the sub-station in solitary splendor. The patrols were working the road between Repput Lake and Syrchester, hoping to halt an epidemic of speeding, and the clerk had a night off.

Mr. David sized up the situation.

"I get it. You are stuck, and you want somebody to sit up all night with you."

Mr. Crosby looked pained.

"Nothing of the kind. I was sitting here reading. There was a knock on the door." Mr. Crosby coughed. "I may have dropped off for a minute, but when I got to the door, nobody was there. All I found was this letter."

Tiny David took a soiled sheet of paper, covered with writing in pencil:

I work in the Zolue plant and have some info you should have. Last week the foreman sent me to the main office with a worksheet. I walked in without knocking. Zolue and his head man, Cornfu, were bending over something on the desk. They tried to cover it up, but I saw what they had.

It was the part of the new bomb-sight we have been making. They also had the part which interlocks with it, and which is made in another plant, and which we aren't supposed to know anything about.

When they saw I knew what they had, they said the second part had always been the weak spot in the new sight, and that they had doped out one much better than the one now being used. They pretended to be very pleased that they had driven another nail in Hitler's coffin. They also said that they were getting ready to call in an Army inspector and tell him what they had. I hung around and watched, and an inspector did go in.

That's why I didn't write you sooner. Then I got thinking about it. I don't know that they showed what they had to the inspector. You guys know how to check on things like this, but don't get me mixed up in it. I got to think of my job.

The signature was, "An American Citizen."

"Hum," said Mr. David.

"Hum yourself," said Mr. Crosby. There was a long silence.

"Knowing you," Mr. Crosby asserted, "I figured you would want to take this and go to town on it. You regard Mr. Zolue as your meat. That's fine by me. But I want to stay on the pay-roll. The letter is going to the Skipper, and he can turn it over to the proper Federal agency."



"This does not constitute a precedent," declared Captain Field.

Tiny David recognized the logic in this decision, but he writhed inwardly at the thought of losing to another officer the man he regarded as his own quarry.

"The letter isn't dated," he pointed out. "Can't you forget about it for a day or two?"

Mr. Crosby, who had already decided to do that, appeared to give the matter thought.

"What am I offered?" he demanded.

"I'll stick around and keep you company."

"Since when has your company had any commercial value?" retorted Mr. Crosby.

"A great many people like to have me around," Tiny David declared. "It seems so nice after I am gone."

Crosby produced a deck of cards, and they settled down to a game of Russian bank, during which they argued constantly and heatedly. At two o'clock they made coffee, and Crosby dug out sandwiches. After that they settled down to just plain arguing.

The sky was flushed with dawn when the telephone rang.

"State Police. Lieutenant Crosby speaking."

A long pause.

"What's that? . . . When? . . . What's your name? . . . Where's your place? . . . We'll be right out."

He banged up the telephone.

"Get the car started!" he called. "Guy shot! I'll leave a note for the gang, and have the operator switch all calls to the barracks."

They drove through the village, and headed north along a lonely country road. Eleven fast miles had clicked by when they saw a man in a cornfield waving excitedly. They halted the car, and followed him into the field.

"I'm Carter," the man explained. "I called you."

On the ground, between two of the rows, was an unconscious man. Bending over him was a man who was obviously a physician. Near by stood a farm youth.

"That's Doc Carson. I sent for him before I called you."

"What happened?" Crosby asked.

Tiny David, bending over the unconscious man, saw a wound in his heaving chest. The rough clothes the man wore were at variance with well-tended hands and a sensitive face.

"I dunno," said Carter. "I was doing my milking when I heard a car roar up the main road. I ran out just in time to see a guy heave this man into my cornfield. I went to him and seen he was hurt bad. Then I called the Doc and you. The guy in the car had beat it before I got here."

"Which way?" demanded Crosby.

"He headed north."

"What did the car look like?"

Carter pondered.

"It was black. A black sedan."

"Get the license number?"

"Not a chance."

Tiny David addressed the Doctor:

"Will he live?"

"No." The physician looked up.

"I didn't even try to move him."

"Anybody know him?" asked Crosby.

They answered in the negative.

"Any chance of his regaining consciousness?" Tiny David asked.

The Doctor shrugged. "He might. Just before the end."

Tiny David turned to Crosby.

"You get started, Jim. If the car went north, he had clear sailing. All your patrols are south of the village, toward Syrchester. Call them in, and send them north. Have the barracks send the border patrols south. I'll stick around here."

Crosby asked just one question:

"What did the driver look like?"

"He was a big guy," said Carter.

"Had shoulders like a bull. That's all I could see."

Crosby departed.

"Will it hurt him if I go through his pockets?" Tiny David asked.

"Not if you don't move him," said the Doctor.

The pockets yielded nothing. Tiny David searched for labels; there were none in the coat. He carefully unknotted the injured man's necktie and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt, preparatory to hunting a laundry-mark. His fingers halted abruptly.

The man wore a string around his neck. Attached to that string was a ring. Tiny David's big, strong fingers broke the string. He glanced at the ring, and gave a start of surprise.

"What is it?" the Doctor asked.

Tiny David's huge fist opened. The physician bent over the outstretched hand. The ring bore a seal and an inscription.

"'United States Military Academy,'" the Doctor read aloud. "Why, then he's an—"

"He is!" said Tiny David grimly. "Doctor, you have to get that man back to consciousness."

The Doctor shook his head as he knelt beside the wounded man.

"I am not a miracle-worker."

Tiny David knelt beside him. The farm men stood silently by, watching the drama. Time passed. The physician's trained fingers sought the pulse of the injured man. His face was grave as he returned the limp hand to the ground.

"He's going fast."

The dying man stirred slightly, and his eyelids fluttered. The Doctor used a hypodermic needle he had been holding.

"It's now or never," he muttered.

THE lips of the man on the ground moved:

"Edith—"

Tiny David bent over him.

"I am Lieutenant David. State Police."

"Good. . . . Got to talk fas—"

His strength ebbed. The Doctor made a gesture of defeat. But the dying man made a great effort:

"New bomb-sight. . . . Zolue made —one part. . . . Doped out—another." His eyelids fluttered. Again the hypodermic needle bit into his flesh. . . . "Crack-up—France. . . . Only optical —broken. . . . Smuggled to. . . . He knew. . . . Caught them. . . . Office —Cornfu took me for—"

Tiny David waited. The Doctor's voice broke the silence:

"That's all." He cleared his throat. "You and I will never know what each one of those words cost him. He died like a soldier."

The big trooper fumbled in his pocket, and produced the West Point ring and the cord. His blunt brown fingers trembled as he tied it around the neck of the man on the ground. Then he rose and snapped to a salute. "That was thoughtful," said the Doctor. "He wouldn't want to lose that. I'll see it isn't removed."

"You take charge here," Tiny David directed. He turned to the farmer. "Can you drive me to town—fast?"

The farmer could, and did. When Tiny David stepped from the car before the Zolue plant, his conflicting emotions had been shuffled about until one predominated—anger. That anger drove him on without delay to the object against which it was directed. There was a job to be done. He had no time for formalities such as locating a patrol or communicating with the barracks.

The guard at the main gate was almost openly insolent.

"You haf an appointment with Mr. Zolue?"

The open palm of Tiny David's right hand pushed the man aside.

"That's my card. I'll take it in myself."

Inside the plant, he confronted a man who was obviously a foreman.

"Where's Zolue?"

"Second-floor, back. His name's on the door."

Outside the door marked, "*Henry Zolue—Private*," a foreign-looking girl attempted to halt the trooper.

"Vat business haf—"

Tiny David grinned. It was a grin that made the girl wish she had not asked the question, and she beat a hasty retreat.

The trooper flung the door open. Zolue, who was at his desk, bending over to fasten the straps of a bag, looked up with obvious alarm.

"So! It is you. I want nothing with you. Nothing until I get you in court."

Tiny David slipped into a chair.

"But you won't be here." He indicated the bag. "A little trip?"

Zolue made an effort at self-control.

"Today I go to Syrchester to attend a meeting of the trade. Tomorrow I return. Now I am very busy. You go and—"

"This won't take long," Tiny David promised. He made a long, involved ritual of lighting a cigarette. "I want to talk with you about your guards."

Zolue's eyebrows were arched. "So?"

"Yes. They have been a bit careless."

Zolue, apparently, was busy with the bag.

"They are a bit strange to this country," Tiny David continued, "and they made a slip. There was an emergency this morning. They used American methods, but their technique was faulty."

Zolue gave his entire attention to the speaker.

Tiny waved his cigarette airily.

"In this country, when we take a man for a ride, we make very sure he is dead before we toss him out."

Now it was a staring match between the two men.

"Half-dead men often talk." There was a long pause. "This one did."

Zolue's face was flushed, and his eyes were glaring.

"What you talk about?" he demanded. "You crazy? You make a big bluff. You think it gets you out of trouble, yes?"

Tiny David tapped a pocket of his tweed coat suggestively.

"Sit nice and still. Keep your hands on top of that desk. Don't let them stray to the telephone or that push-button. I am going to tell you a little story."

Zolue's eyes measured his opponent.

"Don't try it," Tiny David warned him. "This is a hot day. Too much exertion might bring on lead-poisoning."

Zolue subsided.

"Once upon a time," Tiny David began, "there was a master craftsman. Money was his god, and he built up a great industrial empire. Then his country was invaded, and he stood good to lose everything. But he was smart. He made a deal with his conqueror."

"That's a lie!" cried Zolue.

Tiny David ignored him.

"He made his deal before the invaders had reached his city. He offered to turn over his valuable plants undamaged. In return, he was to be allowed to leave the country with his money and the key men who would make it possible for him to make even more money elsewhere."

"You are crazy!"

The frenzy in Zolue's voice told Tiny David that his guessing was



"Let's get to the station-house, fast!" said Tiny.

sound, and he continued with more assurance:

"Hitler needed those plants. It was largely because of them that he invaded this particular country. But Adolph never accepts the first bid. He added some qualifying clauses."

Tiny David shifted about in his chair until he was more at ease.

"The industrialist, some of his money, and a few of his men could go, but he had to promise to serve Hitler in the country to which he fled."

"Bah!" Zolue shouted his scorn. "Hitler is no fool. What hold would he have on me here?"

Tiny David grinned.

"How much is your home plant worth? That's the hold he has on you. Like all the fools who do business with him, you hope he will keep his word, and give it back to you some day. Maybe your sympathies naturally are with him."

THE trooper leaned forward, glaring at the man behind the desk.

"I wouldn't know that, but this I do know: You came here, supposedly seeking sanctuary, and you found it. You traded on the fact that this country always has been the haven for the oppressed of all the world. You were willing to violate the hospitality that has been given hundreds of your countrymen, all of whom have proved their gratitude by becoming good Americans. You had something to offer that was badly needed, and the present emergency made it easy for you to start working for Hitler."

Zolue had lost some of his poise. "You—can't—prove—it."

A crooked little grin played over Tiny David's broad face. Now he was guessing again, putting together the information contained in the letter, and the disjointed words gasped out by the dying Army officer.

"You were given a contract to make one of the optical parts used on a new bomb-sight that reduces night-bombing to an exact science. It was a cinch for you and your pal Cornfu to dope out the part that fits into the one you make. But that isn't all you did."

"Naturally, some of the first sights made were flown to England to be tried out under actual war conditions. A bomber equipped with this sight was shot down over Occupied France. The optical parts were destroyed in the crack-up, but the casing was intact. It was smuggled into this country, and brought here to you. You had two parts to start with. The rest wasn't hard for your high-powered experts."

Zolue attempted a feeble bluff. "Prove it!"

A wave of Tiny David's hand silenced him.

"There was one slight hitch. The United States Army got wind of this.

An officer in Intelligence came here, and caught you with the goods. You killed him. But you bungled the job. He lived long enough to talk to me."

Tiny David became almost genial.

"We have laws covering murder, Zolue. Even the defense program can't interfere with them. While you are learning that, we'll clean out this Trojan Horse you have built here. The machinery will—"

What had appeared to be solid wall opened noiselessly, revealing a monster of a man with beetle brows. He held an automatic, trained at Tiny David's heart.

"Up with your hands!" he ordered. Tiny had no choice but to obey.



Zolue opened a desk drawer, and from it he produced a revolver.

"You gave me bad minutes, Cornfu," he said, in German. "What delayed you?"

"I was seen going north," Cornfu explained. "I veered to the west, doubled back to the south, and then came here by a northeast route. It was hard to elude the patrols."

"You bungled the job," Zolue declared. "He lived long enough to talk. Now we have this swine on our hands." Moving warily, he removed a gun from Tiny David's coat pocket. He chuckled as he shifted to English. "Our work here is finished. We go to a rendezvous south of Syrchester. There is the matter of a blow in the face to be paid for, with interest. It will be attended to there. If we reach there safely, you will be allowed to live. If there is trouble on the road, you die. Do you understand?"

"It seems plain enough," said Tiny. Zolue issued orders:

"You, Cornfu, back down those stairs." He indicated the hidden doorway. "Keep your gun trained on him.

I'll follow, in case he slows up." He grasped the bag. "Get started."

Silently cursing his own stupidity, Tiny David obeyed the commands. The stairs led to a door on the ground floor. Cornfu threw it open, and they were in a yard at the rear of the factory. The trooper studied the windows above him. They were closed.

Zolue chuckled.

"Storage space." The muzzle of his gun indicated the black sedan, which was parked near by. "Walk over there."

They reached the car. Zolue put the bag in the luggage compartment.

"You drive," he told his confederate. "Get in beside him," he ordered Tiny David. "Keep your hands on your knees. Now I get in beside you."

The door of the car slammed. Something hard pressed David's side.

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering



"The guards at the gate are my men," Zolue purred.

The car got under way, and headed toward the gate. The guard saluted.

Zolue was smiling as he spoke:

"You are weighing two possibilities: You might call for help. You might grab the driver and wreck the car. Both plans have the same drawback. You will be dead before they succeed. I do not think you care to pay that price. You look like a sensible man."

Tiny David shrugged in apparent surrender.

They passed along the main street of the village, and headed south.

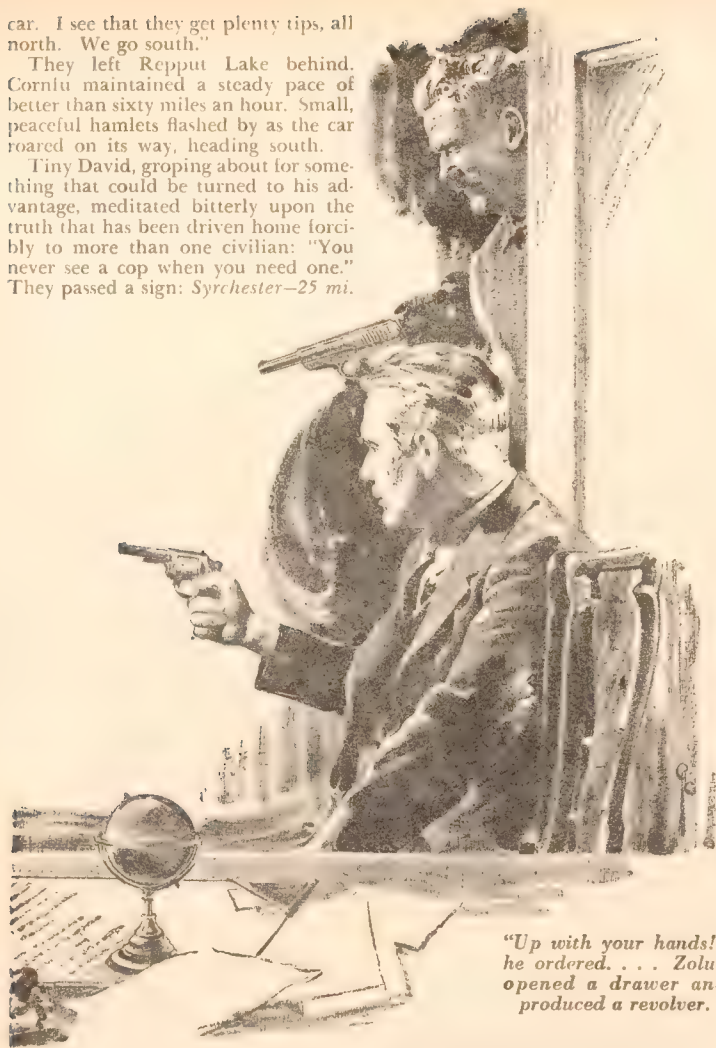
"Relax," Zolue ordered. "You have a long drive."

Cornfu made his first contribution: "You look for your pals. No good. They all go north, hunting a black

car. I see that they get plenty tips, all north. We go south."

They left Repput Lake behind. Cornfu maintained a steady pace of better than sixty miles an hour. Small, peaceful hamlets flashed by as the car roared on its way, heading south.

Tiny David, groping about for something that could be turned to his advantage, meditated bitterly upon the truth that has been driven home forcibly to more than one civilian: "You never see a cop when you need one." They passed a sign: *Syrchester—25 mi.*



"Up with your hands!" he ordered. . . . Zolue opened a drawer and produced a revolver.

"In the city," said Zolue, "there will be policemen. You may be tempted to call to one of them. Remember that sometimes a policeman requires much explanation before he will take action. Your death will halt the explanation. Unpleasant things will happen later, but you will not be here to enjoy them. I am a fatalist. I will meet them calmly, knowing my debt to you has been paid."

Soon they came to the outskirts of the city. Zolue smiled.

"The hour of payment is approaching. Never before have I been struck in the face."

They drove down North Boulevard. Tiny David glanced at the number on a house. "1202." Twelve blocks to the center of the city.

Seven blocks passed. The street intersection ahead had no traffic light,

and Tiny David covertly watched the attendant policeman, who seemed on the verge of halting north and south traffic to allow pedestrians to cross.

The trooper moved his right hand.

"Back on your kneel!" ordered Zolue, and increased the pressure on his captive's side.

The policeman turned, blew his whistle, and held up his hand. Automatically, Cornfu's foot pressed the brake. Tiny David's left foot was even quicker. It shot underneath the brake, jammed it, and remained there despite the pain caused by additional pressure from Cornfu.

At the same instant Tiny's right arm shot forward. The elbow darted back like a piston, struck the hard object against the trooper's side, and drove it back. There was a muffled report, and a bullet tore through the upholstery of the back of the seat.

Meanwhile, Cornfu had drawn back the emergency brake.

The three men were locked in a struggling mass as the car groaned to a halt a scant two feet away from the now irate policeman.

"What's it all about?" he demanded as he strode forward.

Tiny David, struggling desperately to capture the gun-hands of both men, shouted the words that in a war-torn world needed no explanation:

"Spies! Grab 'em!"

The policeman threw open the door on Cornfu's side.

"Watch his gun!" Tiny shouted, turning his whole attention to Zolue.

Cornfu's right hand was free. His finger tightened. But the policeman threw himself upon the gun, pushing it downward. The bullet crashed harmlessly into the floor-boards.

A youth in working clothes stepped out from the milling crowd and joined the m  le. A second policeman arrived, and went to the assistance of his comrade.

The struggle ended abruptly. Tiny David, who had a firm grip on Zolue, turned to the policemen.

"Let's get to the station-house, fast! The United States Army's latest bomb-sight is in that luggage compartment. They almost got away with it."

CAPTAIN FIELD sat behind his desk in one of his most sphinx-like poses.

Zolue and Cornfu had been booked on charges of murder. Judicious questioning had revealed the whereabouts of the Syrchester hide-out, and the police had made a nice haul there. Zolue's imported workmen had been rounded up, and were being questioned by Federal men. Arrangements were under way to operate the plant with men whose loyalty was unquestioned.

"This does not constitute a precedent," declared Captain Field; and he glared at Messrs. David and Crosby. "Do you know what the word *precedent* means?"

"Yes sir," came the chorus.

"You can't expect to pin a murder charge on everybody you put your big paws on," continued Captain Field. "But I hope you keep on trying. Sooner or later, I'll get permanent relief."

Mr. David discreetly said nothing. "On your way out," went on the Captain, "see the top-sergeant. Some triple-plated fool of a clerk marked you '*Assigned to undercover investigation*' instead of listing you as '*Suspended*.' You have some pay-checks coming to you."

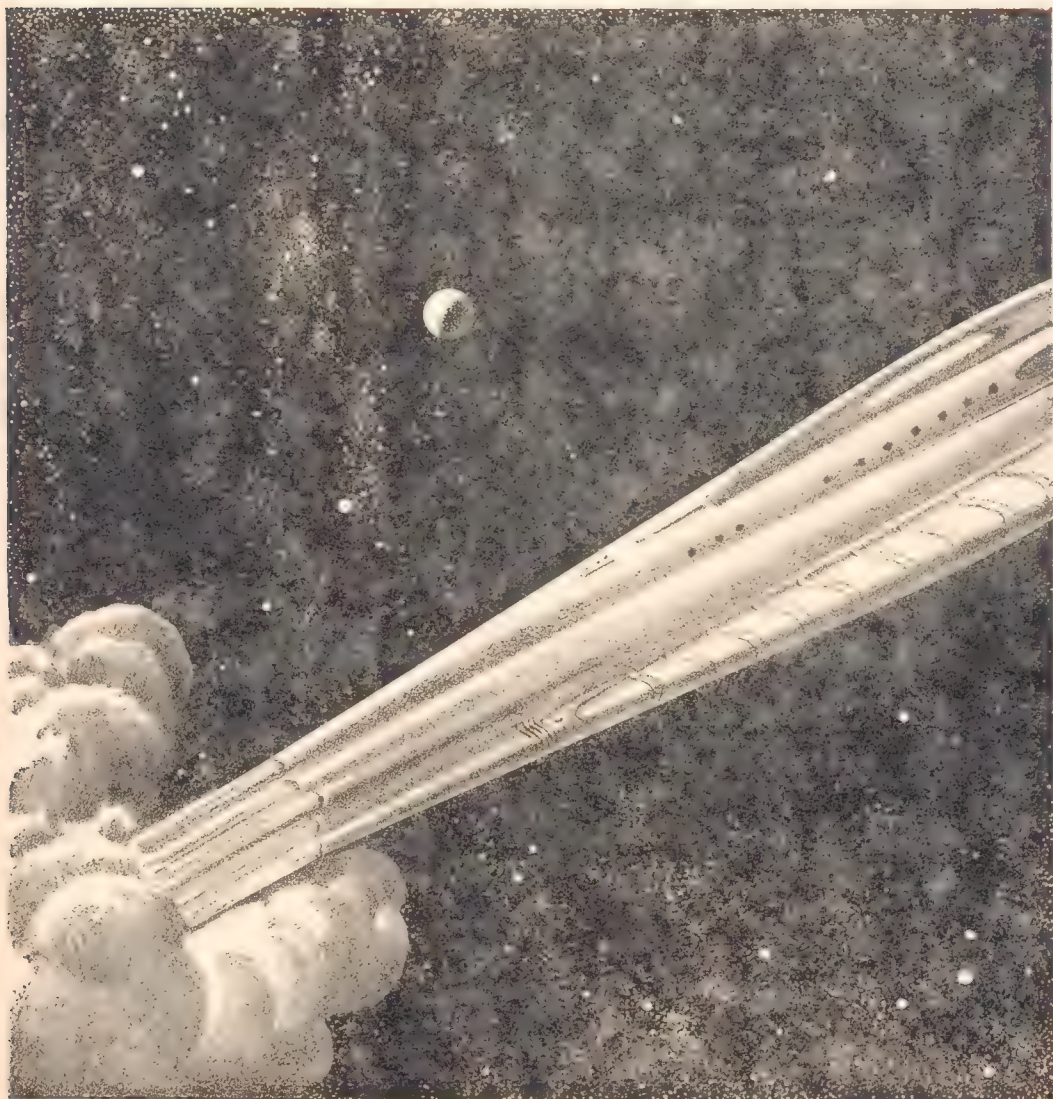
"Thank you, sir," said Tiny David, who had been calmly reading a letter on the desk of the commanding officer. "When the Captain writes the Director of the F.B.I., will he please give him my thanks for the assignment."

They tried to win the World War of 1962 by means of a man-made satellite that controlled the weather

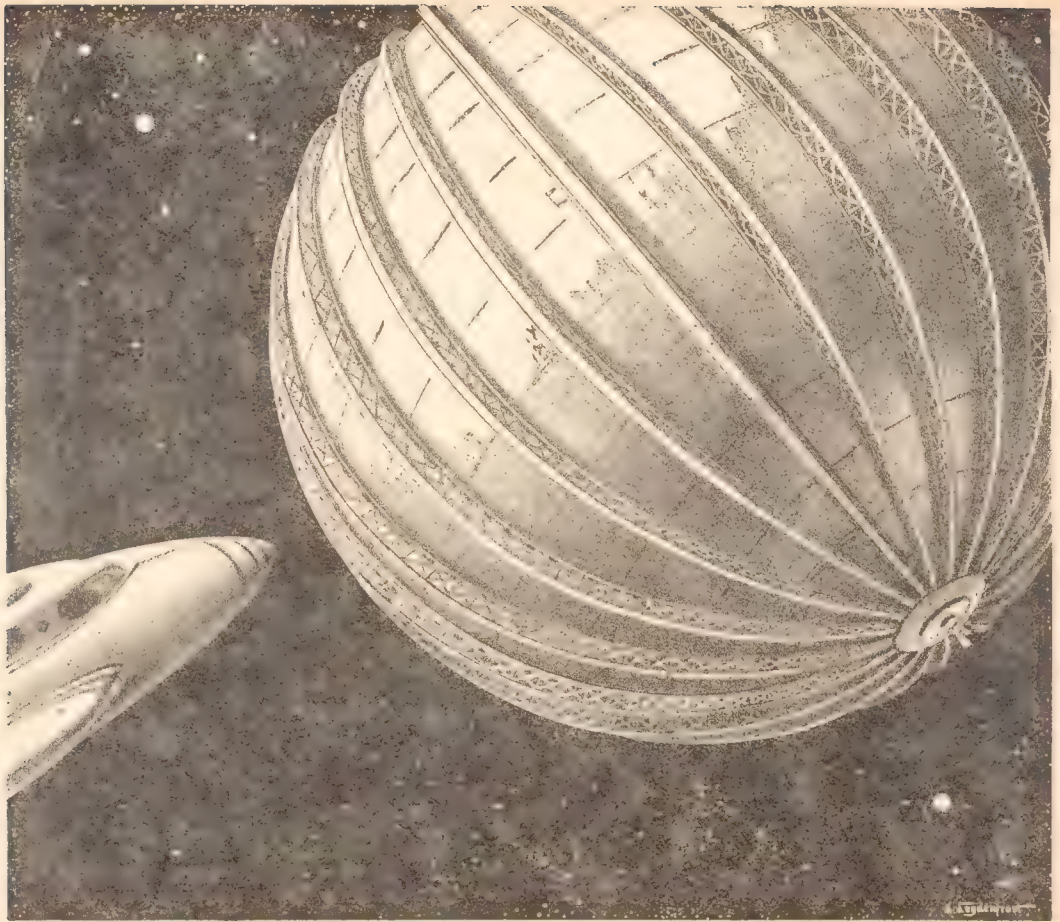
Two Thousand Miles Up

by PETER FREDERICKS

Illustrated by A. Leydenfrost



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YOU have doubtless wondered, along with the rest of the world, why, in 1962, the vicious Clavex that ruled Coalition Europe, and Alexander Wufang, the Pan-Asiatic dictator, did not make their simultaneous attack on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States. You have wondered why the Clavex was destroyed. why Wufang was assassinated, why, after almost continuous war from 1914 to 1958, there has at last come a stable peace to the world—a peace that seems likely to endure. David Braxton's story will answer these mysteries. . . .

David Braxton (son of the great scientist), and his friend Jasper MacGregor were rocket experts, specialists in piloting the passenger-carrying rockets that the Army had developed. They were experimenting with giant bombardment rockets when they were summoned to Washington by Chief Douglas of the secret service. Douglas had learned that the elder Braxton and his associate Thornbold had worked for seven years at a secret rendezvous in Ecuador, perfecting a great discovery; the Clavex agents had found out about it; David and MacGregor were to go to Ecuador, investigate and report.

Even before they started, however, the Clavex emissary Della Gracchi tried to bribe young Braxton—and failing, tried twice to have him murdered.

Arrived at Intihuana, the Andean eyrie where Thornbold worked his miracles, they were met by his niece Susan

Wentworth, and learned his great secret: he was building a man-made satellite to this earth—a minor moon two thousand miles up—with the idea of controlling the weather by its aid. . . .

The next day Thornbold, Susan, David and MacGregor set out in one of the new space-rockets for the Outer Station, to inspect this nearly completed marvel. With them was also one Eric Egstrom, an expert metallurgist and engineer, who had come to Intihuana at the same time as had Braxton and Jasper MacGregor.

They were a thousand miles out in space, driven, yet falling in a sub-lunar orbit that suddenly made the earth a gigantic flattened ball modestly hiding itself behind cloud and atmospheric haze. Suddenly Susan gave a cry. She leaned forward, cut in the manual control. The engines roared through the steering-jets.

"Meteor!" she cried. "Digression two-point-one."

Then David saw the irregular ugly black chunk of stardust, as big as a ten-story building, moving with incredible speed toward them. He did not see how it could miss. (The story continues in detail:)

YET the maneuver was in itself simple. The improved klystron on the dash had recorded the presence of the magnetized metal, and its direction and our swerve gave it a mile or more clearance. The chief difficulty was that we were off our course, had lost split

seconds—and now Susan and Dr. Thornbold were busy plotting a modified orbit.

We would meet the sphere thirty and two-tenths seconds past zenith.

I got a delayed reaction and began to sweat. "Does that happen often?" I muttered.

"Often enough," Susan rejoined, "that you can't day-dream as you were doing. You have to watch your office. The klystron gives ample warning."

Silence fell again. I watched the dials now. Eighteen hundred and fifty miles out, and curving around the earth. It must have been a big curve, too, because I could just see the planet Sirius blazing on the rim of the earth. I tried to figure what part of the earth was turned toward me and gave it up.

Susan sensed this and said: "We have a telescope on the sphere equipped with an infra-red filter. You can see the earth like a steel ball on a pedestal in your library."

It didn't look like that now; it was just a ball of up-holstered cloud looking like a petrified shrapnel explosion.

THORNBOLD had been peering anxiously out. Now he suddenly exclaimed: "There it is." I watched the klystron report the metallic presence and then followed his gaze. For the first time I saw that man-made satellite in all its tremendous detail. You might have been looking at a miniature Saturn. Out of the central sphere radiated twenty-four glittering girders, their outer edges bounded by circular grids. And inside, dividing the ball into segments, were small grids. Part of these had been filled in with flat pieces of durolo-luminite, covered with liquid sodium, so that the dazzling reflection was blinding.

We were coming toward the sphere at incredible speed. Susan was bent over the manual controls, and I watched closely.

Suddenly there was a cyclonic roar from the nose, then smaller explosions from the stern as the steering nozzles shot out control jets. The sphere seemed to wheel in the sky and come on our left, and we were side-slipping toward it.

Never have I admired Susan Wentworth more than in her skill at maneuver. She handled the rocket as if it were a pencil in her hand, and when suddenly the huge sphere bulked so large as to blot out all else, neither it nor we had forward movement, and we floated sidewise toward it as gradually and delicately as you jockey a speed craft alongside a wharf.

"Help with the air-lock," she said as a big bull's-eye like the breech of a gun appeared in the sphere's huge flank.

I hurried back and found Jasper and Egstrom helping Thornbold undog the main manhole in the side of the rocket. I felt a slight bump, heard the sudden whirr of the electric magnet that held the rocket glued to the sphere's side. The manhole swung open on its hinges to reveal a bright passage. At the end of this another circular door opened.

A brick-red round face appeared behind a scowl.

"Well, now," said a voice, "it's about time you'd be showing up. We're about out of water."

Such was our arrival two thousand miles out in space.

I knew, the moment I examined the interior of that ingenious sphere, that Douglas must be informed as soon as possible. Every theoretical device of my father—and many more—were practically used. Jasper gurgled over the machinery like a kid with a grab-bag.

I mean the air regenerator which led the sea-level air that had been used, into a compartment that was filled with the outer space ether. Here the terrific low temperature—over 200 degrees Fahrenheit below zero—froze out the carbon dioxide. The air was piped back, oxygen added, and circulated anew. A small parabolic mirror caught the unfiltered sun's rays, and was the furnace that the air-conditioner used to maintain a constant seventy degrees. The

same terrific sun furnace burned sewage and garbage to fine ash.

Amidst all the machinery, motors, gears, generators and gyroscopes, twenty Indians under Mike Malloy, who had met us at the air-lock, had their being and worked outside on the grids.

While Jasper and Egstrom studied this interior, I examined the spider-web outside. Could those girders and grids be angled to make a curving mirror surface? How long would it take? And if they could, how could I persuade Thornbold to consent?

These were the unanswered questions on my mind when I arranged to take the first trip outside the sphere.

Jasper and I were in our sleeping cubicle, donning the so-called space-armor. This was a complete air-tight covering of supple metallic cloth, polished to dazzling refraction, for such polish would turn the unfiltered sun's rays. The helmet was of unbreakable plastic with fused glass eyepieces. A clever oxygen tank that fed air into the helmet drew it out, froze out the carbon dioxide, as was done in the sphere, and recirculated it. Six hours' supply was carried. To enable you to converse, each helmet had a dry-cell resonator that acted like a small radio and sent your voice a hundred feet or so.

I said to Jasper: "Talk low and answer me; if we took over this sphere, could you operate the machinery alone?"

He stared in blank amazement. "Take over—what do you mean?"

"And when we get outside, look at this durolo-luminite and tell me how long it would take you to warp the grids into a semicircle."

"What's the idea?" he asked quietly.

I told him.

"Even half-covered," I concluded, "if this mirror was a paraboloid, it could give a demonstration that would stop Boehm and Wufang in their tracks. I think that's what we've got to do."

He took a big breath, let it go.

"It's a dirty shame to treat Thornbold like this," he said quietly. "But as you say, it's got to be done. I'll play."

We put on the helmets and went to the main air-lock on Girder One.

I led the way and stepped out briskly. The next instant I found myself clear of the girder and *going up*.

I gave a yell: "*Jasper!*"

He had seen the phenomenon and reached up in time to grab my foot and haul me back. Behind the helmet lens he was laughing heartily.

"You looked like a slow-motion picture of a diver doing a swan dive."

I grinned sheepishly. I had forgotten that there is no weight in space. There was a safety strap at my belt, and I made it fast to the thin life-cable that stretched along the girder. Thereafter, fighting to walk slowly, we bounded along like ballet-dancers doing a Dance of Spring.

Farther out on the girder we saw remarkable examples of this lack of weight. Indians, at work spraying or riveting sheets of durolo-luminite, merely leaped outward when they wanted to get from one grid to the other. I saw them clear one hundred to two hundred feet with a supple spring.

Once one of them misjudged, and was out there in space struggling like a pinned fly to get back. That was where outer space differed from water. There was nothing to push against, and all your wiggles didn't gain an inch. In this case another Indian tied a rope around his middle, leaped up, caught the other and then dragged them both back by the rope. Calmly they returned to work.

The main girders stretched ten miles from either side of the sphere, which, being five miles in diameter itself, made the total mirror diameter twenty-five miles. In a series of awkward bounds and cartwheels we reached a point five miles out. And somehow, in outer space this is not as far as it seems.



I said: "Give me that rope. Pull me back!" And I sprang with all my strength toward the Indian's body.

Here we bent and began studying the girder to see how much of a bend it would take.

Jasper shook his head.

"These girders and grids were prefabricated, Dave. Then set in place. This deep-zero temperature might make it too brittle to bend without heat."

I swore softly. To dismantle the spider-web, take it to earth to bend, was a labor of many months, maybe a year. We didn't have that time.

"There's a way to find out," I muttered. "Let's call on the Indians on Girder Two."

I took the precaution of getting a length of rope from the safety-box. Then, grinning, I said: "Watch this."

I aimed like a diver, squatted on my haunches and took off for Girder Two. It was a most amazing sensation. On earth, you slow down and fall. Up here you neither slowed down nor fell. You kept right on going at the initial speed you had. That was why your aim had to be good.

For a wonder, mine was perfect. I sailed in like a diver, caught the safety-cable and checked my speed. Three hundred and fifty feet in one jump!

Behind me came Jasper—and I roared with laughter. Without gravity, there is no center of balance. He had taken off badly, and now he came majestically across the space, going over and over in cartwheels and utterly unable to stop turning. Fortunately, his aim had been fair, for I could reach up and grab his rope and pull him down. "You went around like a motorcar wheel," I grinned.

His return smile was feeble. "Listen, Dave," he muttered, "be certain you never get loose from this grid. You'll never get back. You'd go through space forever and ever like a meteor or a—a comet."

I was to remember that warning later. Now, in my anxiety to test the flexibility of the durulo-luminite sheets, I forgot it.

These boys were laying the thin sheets and riveting them with a pneumatic hammer. They were as calm as if they were building a palm leaf cottage. I thought to myself: "That proves that any human, no matter how ignorant, can get used to anything."

I picked up a sheet of the paper-thin stuff, fifty feet by fifty, and tested it. It bent as readily as a thin sheet of tin.

I reached down then for a short cross-grid being installed. Steel at that temperature would have shivered like glass. This luminite bent nearly ninety degrees as easily as rubber.

"It's okay," I called joyously to Jasper. "We can put a ninety-degree warp in her—and quick."

"Put a ninety-degree warp in what?"

I turned sharply. Susan Wentworth stood there, staring suspiciously at me through her helmet glass.

CHAPTER TEN



HEN I didn't answer, her green eyes suddenly blazed furiously.

"Answer me," she demanded sharply. Then she took a step backward. "That's it—you're not David Braxton. That explains your attempt to radio—your actions in the alley. You're scheming against my uncle."

"Get this," I said: "My name is Braxton, and I'm not scheming anything that will harm you or your uncle."

She didn't believe me. "Then answer me. What are you going to warp?"

Lord knows, I wanted to tell her. It would have been something to have counted on her to help with Thornbold. But her loyalties ran too deep.

"Forget it," I said. "We were just figuring something."

She nodded coldly. "I think Uncle John will understand."

She turned to walk back to the sphere. Without warning a crash came through my amplifier that nearly deafened me. I was half-turned. What I saw froze me with horror.

Two Indians had been working just beyond us, spraying liquid sodium on laid sheets of durolo-luminite with a compressed-air spray-gun. Something had struck the compressed-air tank a terrific blow, and it had exploded.

The tank opened outward in peels like the petals of a flower. Pieces of it hurled in all directions. Both men were hit. One slowly, languidly collapsed, held to the girder by his safety loop.

The second had no such fastenings. Either through carelessness or because of the nature of the work, he was loose, and as a piece of the tank struck him a deadly blow, his body was knocked loose from the girder and went floating off in space.

"Dear God!" Susan was muttering. "The tank was hit by a meteor!"

Her words broke the spell. I turned to Jasper. "Give me that rope-end. Pull me back."

I crouched, sprang with all my strength upward toward where the Indian's body floated so sluggishly away, drifting like a leaf in a still pool.

I HAD acted instinctively, with no thought; and had I missed the Indian, he was doomed to float eternally in space, a human satellite, for there would have been no second chance to get him. But luckily my direction was reasonable (if end over end) and better yet, my take-off speed was greater. I overtook him with a few inches of rope left.

The instant I seized him I knew something was terribly hot. Instead of brown, he was an angry red. His lips were skinned back in the most terrible grimace of agony. And it could not be from the wound which was in his hip.

Rapidly I jerked myself along the rope, helped by Jasper. Susan came quickly to us.

"I think he's dying," I said grimly; "but I'll never know why."

All her anger forgotten, Susan bent over, and a cry of pity and horror burst from her.

"Quick—get him to the sphere," she ordered. "He's burning to death."

"Burning to death?" Then I saw her face, and I saw the frying flesh through the rent in the space-armor.

The man weighed nothing, of course, so I held him and Jasper held me by the rope, as I bounded like a kangaroo toward the sphere. The accident had been seen, for as soon as I entered the air-lock, the inner door opened and Dr. Thornbold, pale and shaken, took the unconscious man from me. Malloy helped him strip off the space-armor.

"Ah, God's faith!" he said. "What a devilish sun it is! His leg is roasted through to the bone."

"Why was not a watchman on the klystron to give warning?" growled Thornbold.

"There was!" said Malloy. "I went in to tear him to bits. He swore there was no indication of a meteor. And there's no record on the dial."

The Indian, with amazing vitality, still lived. The sweat streamed off him. He babbled incoherently. But there was no chance to save the leg.

"We'll have to get him to the hospital in Quito," Thornbold said. "They'll have to amputate."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. The sight of what the unfiltered rays of a full sun will do to a man's flesh made my stomach heave. Thornbold snapped me out of it.

"You'll go too, David, and bring back the rocket with new supplies. Susan can bring out TX-2."

I saw Jasper giving me the eye. It dawned on me that here was my chance to get to Quito.

Quickly we shifted out of the space-armor. When I came into the main chamber again, Susan was there. She was holding a chunk of bent metal in her hand.

An idea came to me and I went to her. "Listen, Susan," I said, "about what you said out there—"

She cut me short.

"Would you say that's a bullet-hole?" she asked quietly.

I looked at the metal chunk. There was a small smooth hole about the size of a .30-.30 slug in it.

"Most meteors aren't much bigger than marbles,"* I said. "And if it had a counter-orbit, it would hit harder than a bullet. And—"

I broke off. The edges of the hole curved inward, and there was a light sheen of brighter metal glittering on the darker chunk. A cupro-nickel slug will leave just such a mark. I remembered the fact that the klystron guard swore there was no warning of approaching metal.

"Yes," I said, "it's a rifle-bullet hole."

She nervously squeezed the metal.

"But why, David, why?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Only—"

Again she cut me off. "Don't say anything to Uncle John about this. I want to talk to you later. And"—she gave me a straight stare—"I mean talk."

Jasper was not going. I got a half-minute with him.

"Somebody on this egg has a rifle," I said, and told him our finding. "Now, be savvy but go through the sphere inch by inch and find out who owns it."

He nodded. "You going to Quito?"

"More than ever. If that slug was meant for us—Della Gracchi's got a friend out here."

Twenty minutes later I released the magnetic coupling; and Susan, using the port and starboard steering jets, maneuvered the rocket into the earthbound orbit. I would have stayed forward for more study of the orbit-computing science of astronautics, but someone had to stay with Quexl, the Indian, during the atmosphere transit. So I was beside him during the early silent part of the journey.

He was in great pain despite the sedative. Then, suddenly, he sat up under the slack straps.

"Señor!" he muttered. "¡Pronto! Dr. Thornbold! I am die, and must tell him strange Indian on sphere."

I jerked forward.

"Strange Indian? What do you mean?"

He relaxed, groaning. "Him call' Pepito, señor. He claim village I know. An' no Pepito ever live there. I tol' 'em so. And he shot me. Si, get Dr. Thornbold—" He rambled on incoherently.

FOR a few minutes I sat staring out at the huge flattened globe that was the war-weary earth. Then, making Quexl fast, I went forward.

Susan's glance met mine.

"You've got to tell Dr. Thornbold," I said grimly.

"There's a strange Indian on that sphere, and Quexl claims the man shot him."

Thornbold sat upright, staring. Susan sighed, "You're right, I suppose," and told him of the bullet. I had expected her to tell of her suspicions of me. But she did not. I gave her a mental pat on her bright coppery hair for that.

"But—but—what does it mean?" cried Thornbold.

*Of the billions of meteors that strike the earth's atmosphere annually, only a few are bigger than actual dust. Thus when atmospheric friction brings incandescence (or "shooting star"), they are utterly consumed. Only a few immense meteors have actually struck the earth. An Arizona crater over a mile in diameter marks one; in Siberia one twenty miles in diameter left its scar. Museums have some as big as a half-ton. A few meteor pebbles are found.



"Good Lord!" I said, and went over in a power-dive. "Clavex combat planes!"

"It means a little old-fashioned fifth columning by the Clavex," I said. "It means they're trying to get possession of your sphere."

He was pale, shaken.

"And they won't use any flat mirror," I concluded.

"You're wrong; Quexl's wrong. Those Indians are as honorable—"

"This one is a counterfeit," I cut in. "He lied, and Quexl caught him. The point is, how many more ringers are there?"

I hadn't intended to, but suddenly I launched into a plea. "You can't go on, unprotected, trying to keep this secret," I said. "It's too tremendous—too charged with world dynamite. Let me radio Douglas to send some air infantry from Panama. Let's tell him the truth. With your sphere, you hold now the power of peace or war."

I should have known better. His eyes blazed; he began to tremble. I don't think he even heard all I said.

"No, no!" he shouted passionately. "I would rather destroy it—and all the equations—than give it into the hands of any government under threat of war. People are like animals; they take a good thing and make it evil. I forbid you to tell anyone of what you have seen."

"Listen, Doctor," I told him: "people are more like children. They are greedy, grasping, and they want to fight for something they desire. They need a big world cop to keep order by threat of spanking. You've got the threat, and the United States can use it—"

"Quiet!" he raged. "I will not listen. Wars! All my life I have seen war, and the creations of my mind and other scientists' used to inflict brutal, ghastly death. It shall not happen again. I will not permit it." He glared

at me. "I have your pledge of secrecy. David, for your father's sake, you cannot betray this."

I could hear my teeth grinding. Good God, I didn't want to betray him. But what was my word given to an eccentric half-mad man as against the peril that now seemed more and more to doom the earth?

I caught Susan's warning glance and bit down on my retort. To avoid answering, I went back and sat with Quexl during the rest of the trip.

At forty miles, Susan cut in the cyclonic stern nozzle (we fell in this orbit like a spent shell, stern down) to slow up our fall to a non-incandescent five hundred miles an hour. By that time I had made another painful decision. . . .

I'll skip over that landing. It was a beauty, and the stern hit the lake water near the supporting crane as gently as a dropped feather. As soon as the crane had swung in, I carried Quexl out and put him on the wharf. Then I ran to the transport plane to warm up the twin Hurricanes.

I was just ready to cut in the starters when Susan came up the aisle to the pilot's coop.

"I was going to run Quexl in," she said.

This was show-down.

"Susan," I said, "it's quite possible that no matter what I do, Della Gracchi and the Clavex will grab the Outer Station. But just the same, I'm going into Quito and talk with Douglas. I'm going to get him to send troops. Fighter planes. Guns."

I stared up defiantly at her.

"That's what I was going to do before when you stopped me. This thing is so big your uncle hasn't got any right to run this risk. I'm going to betray this secret, and I'm going to fly this crate into Quito, no matter who tries to stop me."

I expected an angry outburst. But her green eyes did not kindle.

"Bring Quexl aboard," she said. "I'll warm up the engines."

I could only sit and grin feebly at her. "You mean—" "I'm going with you. Then we can talk. Get Quexl."

We took off against the darkening sky in thirty minutes. I'll never forget that ride. It told me it was much later in the game than even I had thought. The first tip came as we winged toward Huapac Pass. I had been dumping all my thoughts in Susan's lap. Suddenly she pointed down to the rising plateau.

"Look! Smoke!"

"Well," I said, "it's cold this high, and the people have got fire."

"You don't understand. That's the Buenaventura mine—and it's been abandoned for ten years. Exhausted vein. Uncle almost settled there because of the big flying-field."

I shoved out the stick and wheeled over in a power-dive.

It was a good thing I did power-dive. When we came down the six thousand feet to the plateau, I saw little specks of men pushing frantically at several airplanes.

"Good Lord!" I muttered, and shoved her nose down harder. It was risky. This plateau was twelve thousand feet above sea-level, and the air was thin, and the plane hard to control. But I had to get another look at those tiny planes.

There was some kind of a wooden shed on the left. The men had shoved one crate in when I leveled off fifty feet up; but I got a good look at the others and felt sick.

"Clavex combat planes—fighters," I announced. "See the Maltese crosses?"

"I saw flashes," she replied coolly. "They fired on us."

There was no use in going back. The tiny fighting craft were gone when I made a climbing turn. And there was Quexl to think of. But as I started upstairs to enter the pass, a sudden realization thudded in my brain.

"Susan," I muttered, "those fighting crates only have a six-hundred-mile range. They couldn't have flown the ocean. Where did they come from?"

"Maybe—maybe the war's begun at last," she said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



SAW him when we entered the Conquistador Hotel to find Harbin, the American consul. We had left Quexl at the hospital, and I wanted to use the consular radio.

And there was Rodolpho Della Gracchi puffing a cigarette and beaming in my direction.

"Here's trouble," I whispered to Susan. "Keep smiling, and I'll find out where those fighter planes came from."

I bore over to Della Gracchi.

"Ah, Signor Braxton," he said. "And this must be Signorina Wentworth."

"There was nothing on the radio about war yet," I said.

"No, there is no war."

"There's going to be one in about eighteen hours," I said. "I'm radioing the Air Base at Panama that several Clavex fighters are resting in American-mandated territory."

That shook him, and slowed down his smile to a walk. "So? It is impossible," he growled.

"We're waiting here to guide the reconnaissance squadron back."

"Now, now, signor!" His odd blue eyes grew opaque. "Possibly—just possibly. I say—one or two of our planes on a practice flight might have been forced down. But—"

"Practice flight from where? Saigon? Paris? Maybe Rome?"

He grew red.

"The oceans are free. Possibly one of our aircraft-carriers on a training cruise. *Si*, that must be it."

He was a liar. With war likely at any moment, no aircraft-carrier ever goes any place without a fleet to protect it.

It was two hundred miles to Buenaventura. That meant, at the most, that such an aircraft-carrier would be less than a hundred miles off the Ecuadorian coast—unless there was gas cached at the old mine.

He saw my expression. "Signor Braxton, you are a friend of Dr. Thornbold's. Also of his charming, lovely niece, I perceive. Cannot you persuade them that we wish only to use Dr. Thornbold's rocket discoveries for peaceful commercial ventures?"

I tried to look through the mask of his smile. Was he lying? Or was he actually unaware of the colossal potential weapon hanging out there in space? His face told me nothing.

"You know the answer," I said curtly. "Get those crates out of there. And lay off Thornbold, Della Gracchi. Your Herr Boehm has been hollering for war. He's going to get plenty unless you get busy."

I took Susan's arm and swung away. After me came Della Gracchi's soft syrupy voice:

"I shall find means to persuade you, Braxton, even if unpleasant."

On the way up to Harbin's apartment, I said bitterly: "He's running this whole show, and he thinks I'm bluffing. And I probably am. The last I heard, the United States needed another year to get ready. They won't start a fight unless—"

"Unless what, David?" she said.

"Unless we can—well, just take over the sphere, make a paraboloid and give Boehm a small demonstration."

I hadn't dared mention that before, because it was drastic. It meant direct conflict with her uncle—maybe I'd have to tie him up or something.

She didn't flinch. She just said: "Maybe that won't be necessary."

The minister, Frank Harbin, sweating and angry, opened the door and said: "You'll have to wait, Braxton, despite your credentials. I've had damned terrible news."

"News?" I wondered if he meant the fighter planes.

"Yes. The pilot of the Santiago-Quito-Panama Express northbound was here since you telephoned. And what do you think he told me?"

I shook my head. "What?"

"To avoid a small thunderstorm, he flew out to sea—eighty miles offshore. And he saw plainly—plainly, mind you—a Clavex submarine aircraft-carrier."

His face grew redder.

"Damn their insolence! The Hemisphere waters were denied to their warcraft six months ago."

He talked on, but I didn't hear.

A submarine aircraft-carrier!

A lot of things passed through my mind, all of them terrible.

Along with everyone else, I had heard the rumors of a new secret weapon of the Clavex that would render American resistance impossible. One correspondent abroad, before mysteriously disappearing from human sight forever, had got through a dispatch hinting that the Clavex were experimenting with submarine aircraft-carriers. The Clavex had immediately denied the charge. And our Navy officials had said that such a craft was impossible, and there were long articles befogged with statistics to prove it.

YET here was a submarine aircraft-carrier, and I knew what it meant.

The whole thesis of the American military was based on the Atlantic Ocean as the first line of battle. With swarms of fighter and bomber planes based on the East Coast, with a Navy that could be swiftly grouped, we were prepared to resist to the death any attempt to force a crossing of the Atlantic.

And since our aircraft were powerful and piloted by brave skilled men, we could at least hold our own unless

I took off—a low forward dive. . . . Then that automatic seemed to blaze in my very face.



overwhelmed by superior forces—to say nothing of the rocket-projectile barrage.

But a submarine aircraft-carrier changed all that. No longer would Clavex bombers and protecting fighting planes have to fly across more than three thousand miles of Atlantic to bombard our cities and defenses. No longer would the Pacific guard our West Coast from Wufang's Mongolian bombers.

Sneaking up under cover of night, submerged, the submarine aircraft-carrier could rise to the surface, launch its planes to blast with bombs vital defenses—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore—and return before dawn to the submersible, which would drop to the sea floor to remain invisible—and then repeat the attack at some other point the next night.

Despite the vast number of our airplane fighters, we could not hope to keep enough at all vulnerable points, when we would not know from one night to the next where the next attack would take place. The Clavex could—if they had enough of these submersibles, and they doubtless would have—gain air superiority at any given point by war's greatest weapon—surprise.

I thought of that, and then I thought of Della Gracchi and his immediate threat. I interrupted Harbin as he was calling Washington.

"How long was she? How wide? How many did the Pan-Am pilot think she carried?"

Harbin scowled. "She crash-dived when Swanson went down for a better look. But she was big. He said eight hundred feet long, anyway. Maybe a hundred-foot beam, with twin conning-towers and periscopes on each side."

I made a rough calculation and scowled at the result. Such a craft could carry between thirty-five and forty planes at least. Ten of them would be medium bombers.

Ten bombers could carry men enough to seize the base when there were already Della Gracchi spies inside.

"I think," I said slowly, "that unless Douglas gets real busy, he's going to find the horse gone."

It was a good time to be calling Douglas. The presence of a Clavex submarine aircraft-carrier in Hemisphere waters would give Washington a large dose of hysteria, and get quick action. And I could talk plainly. The radio—being diplomatic—had a scrambler* which would keep the secret.

I got Douglas an hour later.

"Did you hear about the submarine aircraft-carrier?" he said at once. "Good God, do you know—"

"Hang onto your chair," I cut in. "That's minor news now."

I poured it out, getting just as technical as I could about the man-made satellite. I told him what could be done to make a paraboloid, and how long. I told him about Della Gracchi, and the danger increasing by minutes.

"You've got to fly men to Intihuana," I concluded, "and fly 'em fast. Here are the map coördinates. If you waste even an hour, you may have Ernst Boehm spitting on the White House steps."

He was a long time in speaking, and when he did, his voice was awed.

"Good God, Braxton, did you really see this and not dream it?"

"You studied under my father. You know it's true."

His voice grew sharp with authority:

"Get back there immediately. Do what you can for defense against inside sabotage. If Della Gracchi attacks and you can't hold out, destroy the rockets."

His voice rose.

"You hear me? Destroy the rockets. Under no circumstances must the Clavex get that sphere. Get away with Thornbold, and we'll build new rockets here to reach the sphere and carry out your idea. But the works are shot if Della Gracchi gets a rocket."

I knew that. "How long will you be?"

"Twenty-four hours at the latest—sooner if the Panama Airwings can take off at once."

I had to settle for that. I thanked Harbin, took Susan and headed back for the airport. I told her how it was, Douglas' orders.

"Oh," she cried, "Uncle John would never do it! Never, David. That would condemn every man on that sphere to death."

I thought of Jasper and went sick inside. I think I prayed, then, that I'd never be put to that decision.

*A scrambler-equipped radio has an electro-cell that changes spoken words into short waves that are received at the destination and by another cell in the power tube turns them back into spoken words.



The submarine aircraft-carrier was foundering. I could see airplanes blown off the deck.

I only said: "Susan, it may have to be that way. We've got to think of one hundred and fifty million people—and many more millions in the future."

She clung to my arm, and somehow she was more frail, more feminine than the boyish slim girl in riding-breeches and boots who could move a rocket-ship like a pencil.

While I was warming up the crate, she came with the weather report.

I said: "Susan, I've put 'em on the table with you. I've got to tangle with your uncle. Where are you standing?"

She climbed into the co-pilot's seat. For a while we both just sat, watching the control tower for the take-off highball. Then she shivered, leaned insensibly toward me. She looked as if she wanted to cry hard.

"It's horrible to think of—horrible!" she whispered. "But —David—if you can't find another way, why, God help us both."

I started to put my hand on hers. But the control tower gave us the highball, so I poured on the coal and we went upstairs in a long shallow climb—without lights, and instrument-flying in mountain gorges. But I knew we'd be shot down if seen. Della Gracchi was moving fast.

One thought bothered me as we flew that lonely flight. How much did Della Gracchi really know? On that depended how quickly he would try to move in. I put the crate on her ceiling, thirty thousand feet, to muffle our motor drone. We had on oxygen masks and didn't talk, but we seemed closer together, and there was comfort just in our nearness.

Nothing happened during the lonely trip. There were a few ticklish seconds when I let down under a cold white moon toward the sheet of quicksilver that was the lake. There were no flood-lights, so at three thousand I dropped

two magnesium flares, made one turn and then came in straight, taking plenty of lake to slide over.

As we taxied to the wharf, Susan said: "He's a dear old man, David, and life has hurt him. So be patient. Don't lose your temper and yell."

I smiled wryly. My temper had got me in plenty of trouble before.

"I give you my word," I said. "I'll hang onto it. But—but he's got to see it our way."

I cut the switches, and we climbed down to the landing. The place was in darkness save for the observatory, and we went there.

Dr. Thornbold paced the floor, and never had I seen him in a more towering rage. With no word of greeting, he shouted angrily: "Someone on the Outer Station used the radio and talked in code. And not with me here."

My lips tightened. That special radio in the sphere, made to penetrate the Heaviseide layer, was only for drastic emergency. I knew now that more than one Della Gracchi spy was in the crew.

"And not an hour later," Thornbold was yelling, "two planes came over. They had the temerity to come so low they nearly hit the repulsion gun."

I looked at Susan, and she nodded slightly.

"You're going to hear worse, Dr. Thornbold," I said grimly; and before he could interrupt, I told him in detail just what the danger was. The man had buried his brain so often in ponderous mathematical equations that he had lost touch with reality. I don't think he perceived the grave immediate peril, even when I outlined it bluntly. He only came to life when I told him Douglas' suggestion that we destroy the rockets, abandon the base and get to the United States.

I was concluding: "In six months you can build a new rocket, and we can—"

"Stop!" he shouted, pale with fury. "I say nothing now of your deliberate violation of my confidence. But when you want me to murder those men who trust their lives to me—no, David, I'll never do it. *Never!*"

"But David is right, Uncle John!" Susan said steadily. "You spoke of murder of those men on the sphere. Yet if you permit the Outer Station to fall into Clavex hands, you will murder millions of others—and worse, you will murder every liberty two thousand years of history have yielded."

My heart warmed to her. What a girl! She hated what she was doing—but she did it.

Thornbold was stung. "Susan!" he cried. "Even you!" He shook his head sadly. "I haven't long to live. I swore to Cornelius that I'd see the day his dream was practical, and I shall."

It was a stymie. That is, unless I forcibly removed him from our path.

Suddenly I got an idea. "How much food and water and oxygen could you store on the Outer Station?"

The abruptness bewildered him.

"Why—why, six months—a year—there is plenty of room there—only—"

He broke off and looked upward. I heard it too, the deep drone of twin-engined planes. It was impossible for the Panama Airwing to have got here.

"Clavex," I said to Susan.

Were we too late? Were they letting down to make an attack? The sound circled, came no lower. It appeared to be another reconnaissance. I knew, then, if dawn found us here, that was the finish.

I spoke sharply: "You can plot an orbit that could land rockets in the United States, couldn't you?"

Thornbold turned his bald head.

"Why, yes, of course. Only without a body of water—a crane to prevent toppling of the rocket—"

"They've got that at Pike's Peak," I cut in. "We can land the rockets with all the food, water and oxygen tanks you've got. We can go to the Outer Station. *And we can stay there*, and later make a trip to the States."

Lord help me, I was tricking him. When I got out to that Station, I was going to put a bend in that spider-web that would put a bend in Boehm's loud tongue.

Susan seized eagerly on my idea.

"Don't you see, Uncle John? If we have both rockets out there, they can't come to us. We're safe!"

ANXIOUSLY I watched Thornbold's face. It lit up. "Yes, yes," he muttered, "that could be done. We could stay there—we could do more. We could really use it as the Outer Station."

He clapped his hands almost like a child.

"Do you know, David, that by plotting an orbit of ten miles a second—only three more than escape-velocity—we could reach Mars in three months? And we could return."

I stared in amazement.

"Yes, a trip to the United States to get extra supplies. The experiments on weather control. Then the Outer Station is the beginning of special exploration as I always dreamed it should be."

Susan's lips quivered. I knew now that Thornbold was pathological.

"Sure," I nodded. "The main thing is to load what's here now. Suppose Susan and I attend to that, and you plot an interception to the Outer Station."

He nodded, his face actually joyful, and picked up his slide rule. Susan and I walked quietly out.

"He's always lived within himself," she half-whispered, "his own little world that rarely touched the real one. But—but he'll never really understand."

I patted her arm. "Let's arrange with the crew and the supplies."

We had the base gang feverishly loading. It occurred to me once to destroy the machinery, but then I decided not to. Even if there had been enough material to build a rocket, Della Gracchi lacked the vital essential, the electrostatic field that held the pentahyzone stabilized.

I had a talk with the Dutchman, Van Hootstraten, and told him the danger.

"You've suffered under the Clavex," I finished. "I'm leaving it to you to get these Indians off before dawn. You can fly a plane. There's the transport. Load the others aboard, get to Quito and put yourself under the protection of the American minister."

He nodded, then looked up at the star-studded sky.

"Alvays," he said softly, "I vished out there to see the dream of der great Cornelius. Der t'ing ve haf mit our hands made. So—now"—he shrugged—"I shall not see, efer."

Did he have, poor devil, a premonition?

BY one o'clock we had by my estimate, food, air and water for three months, and the rockets could hold no more.

While Susan made the final check, I went for Thornbold. I smiled grimly. He was, with his pentahyzone stabilizer, more precious than all else. With the electrostatic field formula, everything else could be duplicated in time. Without it, all else was lost.

He had computed two orbits one minute, 13.02 seconds apart, and he was definitely in an hallucination.

"Escape," he was muttering, "complete escape forever, away from this earth where men shut their eyes to beauty, and fight like beasts in the jungle."

He looked at me feverishly.

"Mars has atmosphere, David. Who knows but that God has made His image there? Men of intellect, perhaps, where peace and intelligence combine to make the perfect world."

He clapped his hands.

"We would stay, David, escape forever from evil and hate and horror."

I spoke to him gently. He had the sensitive man's passion to escape from unhappy environment. Just as my father and he had escaped to this lonely spot, so he would move on. The thoughts kept him occupied, so I agreed and led him out through the night to where the repulsion gun reared its black snout toward the moon and the stars.

He would ride with Susan. I had insisted on that. For, believe it or not, I was more certain she would make a safe arrival than I. This would be my first attempt at manual maneuvering out there where nothing is familiar and all is danger.

The TX-1 was already in the repulsion gun, and Van Hootstraten had my rocket, the TX-2, on the crane ready to swing in the moment she was clear. I walked to the gun, my mind testing again the brief knowledge of setting the gyroscopic controls.

Thornbold handed me the data, and a celestial chart with the drawn orbit.

"You will arrive in darkness," he said, "so I have increased the curve. But daylight will come in eight minutes. If you have doubt, turn left gyroscope two-zero-six and wait and make visual contact."

He chuckled suddenly. "We've beaten them, David; we've escaped—perhaps forever."

He entered the manhole. Susan arrived with the tenth-second sidereal time. She frowned gravely.

"If you're a minute overdue, I'll fret," she said. "Remember—watch the klystron."

As if her words were the signal, the high drone of planes returned. Not one or two, but the diapason of many.

"You win by a nose," I said grimly. "They're coming for keeps."

She lifted her face to the stars. I knew then that I loved her, had for all eternity. High up there, a series of

magnesium flares shot downward, their parachutes blossomed, and slowly blinding light came earthward like a faltering comet.

She looked down, gave me her hand. I pulled her toward me, and then her face tilted and I pressed my lips to hers. She returned the pressure, and for an ecstatic instant we were one and there was nothing else in the world.

She stepped back. The diapason of motors drew circular lines of sound against the night as the big planes let down.

"I'm not sorry," I said.

She turned to the rocket entrance. "I—I wouldn't want you to be, David."

Then she was gone; the circular door clanged tight. I felt happy, and I grinned up at the droning planes.

Van Hootstraten called: "One away, Mein Herr Braxton. You will just about make it, ja."

The next instant there was a terrific "Whoom!"

A thud loud enough to be an explosion. Staring at the repulsion gun's mouth, I saw the bright shining needle spear upward, star-glitter along her smooth side, moonlight etching with silver pencil the long graceful slip of her smooth contour. I heard the soft swish as she cleaved the air.

Just a brief instant, and she no longer blotted out the stars.

Already the electric motor of the crane whined and lifted TX-2 into the orifice. Already men labored at the repulsion control.

The flares came lower, and one rested on the lake and flared like a searchlight. The motor drone gave away to popping sounds. I'd make it, with seconds to spare.

I called to Van Hootstraten: "The transport is warmed. Run. You'll make it, because they are coming in and can't make a fast take-off."

"Me, ve are all right," he called steadily. "In mit you, all iss—"

I heard no more. High up against the stars a streak of livid flame stretched across the night skyline a burning scythe. Down upon me thundered the roar of the TX-1's engine, pounding like a hundred cannon explosions.

I saw the parabola of flame streak higher as a sky-writing airplane leaves its trail of smoke. I grinned and ran to the manhole. The first bomber crate was cutting the lake surface with white spray.

I closed the threaded round door, adjusted the orbit control and set the gyroscopes spinning in their evacuated cases.

With two and a fifth seconds to go, I slammed down into the acceleration seat. Funny what you can think of in such a brief flash of time. I thought of Susan and her soft warm mouth; of her streaking up there in a man-made comet. I thought of Della Gracchi, probably out there in a bomber with Clavex guns and Clavex persuasion. I grinned. For once it was he who was too late.

The second hand clicked!

I braced myself. My finger stabbed the repulsion release.

With a smashing thud, an elephant leaped onto my head and chest. The blazing stars vanished. I had no recollection of the TX-2 spearing upward into infinity.

CHAPTER TWELVE



HERE is little to relate of that second voyage to the Outer Station. There was actually a sense of boredom, the cramping lack of freedom that assails you when, in train, plane or other vehicle, you can only sit and wait until you arrive.

I had only to sit and watch the klystron, and endure the soundless, weightless existence in nothingness.

Yet this very stillness gave me time to think as I pierced the blackness of outer space. An idea that might, pos-

sibly, help Van Hootstraten and the others and give Della Gracchi his first inkling of our power. It would also keep Thornbold occupied.

I had that on my mind, and the necessity of learning the identity of Della Gracchi's agents in the sphere, when I first sighted that man-made satellite. It was on my right, and Thornbold had plotted the orbit so precisely that I was curving alongside as a spur railroad track makes a delicate Y into the main line.

Despite that, I made a devilish mess of coming alongside. Just as a raw pilot overcontrols, so I stopped too soon, gave too much starboard jet, and once I was rocking like a boat in a heavy sea. The sun was up three minutes before I finally maneuvered to the air-lock.

Because of its vital import to what happened later, I must describe in detail how the two rockets were moored.

You understand there was only one air-lock for the rockets, because usually only one came at a time. So when Susan had fastened on, I hung off until the unloading was completed. Then someone—Jasper, I found out later—donned a space-armor, the rocket was detached and slowly swung until it lay between the sphere's bulging side and Girder Three. Here it was attached to the sphere by magnetic attraction. Jasper then could come through the rocket's air-lock to Girder Three, and walk back to the main air-lock.

That left the regular air-lock free for me to hook on. This, as I have said, I finally and awkwardly did.

Jasper met me in the main chamber and shook my hand so hard it seemed in a vise.

"Susan told me you made it by an eyelash," he said.

"Who used the radio?" I said. "Did you find the rifle? What about this Indian, Pepito?"

"Hey, one at a time," he said. "I don't know who used the radio. Everyone says he didn't, and whoever it was took the sleep-period and wasn't seen."

"I wouldn't think an Indian could use a radio," I muttered.

"I've got Pepito in storage," said Jasper. "He won't open his trap. Maybe you'll have better luck."

"And the rifle?"

"Dave, it just aint on this revolving golf-ball. And if you don't think I searched, then take a look yourself."

When I didn't speak, he went on: "All I got is that one of the Indians, Sancho, who seems okay, said he was working on Girder Eight when something went past his head. He said it looked like a stick. This was right about the time the shot must have been fired. So I figure the shooter took his shot and then just threw the rifle away."

"Just ducky," I said, "a rifle floating off into space. What does that get us?"

Jasper said he didn't know. Now that we were tied to this sphere for an indefinite time, it became more vital than ever to find out who Della Gracchi's agents were. But how? Where to make a start?

For the moment I dismissed that angle.

"Let it go for now," I said. "Have you figured out that warping job?"

"Sure. All we got to do is make the arcs with the metal." He showed me drawings of the spider-web and where the bending must be done.

"As soon as I find out how Thornbold plans to use a flat mirror, we'll start," I said.

Thornbold had his own private cubicle opening into the smaller observatory which fronted on the aiming-machinery of the sphere.

He was in there with Susan, still calculating and still obsessed.

"At ten miles a second," he was saying, "we could fall in the Martian orbit, 864,000 miles a day. We could—"

He broke off as I came in. "Hah, David, we shall have to postpone the space trip. We need a greater reserve of food, air and water. And the pentahyzone tanks will have to be enlarged—"

"I know," I said, "But first, let's consider something else. You've got the mirror half-completed. How much of a heat beam would that throw?"

He was startled, and for an instant acted rationally.

"Why, possibly one hundred and fifty million horsepower."

"And is the deflecting mechanism of the sphere in order? Have you the gear to aim and direct the light-beam to any given point?"

Egstrom and Mike Malloy came in and stood near the door.

"Of course," Thornbold said impatiently. "That was worked out first of all. What are you driving at, David?"

"This," I said grimly: "You haven't yet experimented to see what you can do with weather. Here's your chance. There are rain and heat off Quito where the Clavex submarine aircraft-carrier is. That's a favorable condition. See if you can make a little windstorm."

"But why should I do that?"

I COULDN'T tell him my real reason. I said: "To show this power for good. And prevent planes from taking off that might harm Van Hootstraten and all the refugees who have served you so well."

That fetched him erect, eyes bright.

Susan said: "Yes, Uncle John. You've got to test your control of the light-beam."

Her quick alert glance at me told that she knew what I wanted—to maroon the Clavex planes at the base by weather that would prevent their return to the aircraft-carrier. So they'd be there when Panama Airwing arrived.

I said: "My father always thought that a beam of heat on rain and warm tropical air which makes hurricanes could set up a counter-current and maybe prevent the storm."

"Impossible," growled Egstrom.

"Who asked you?" I growled.

I was startled by his look of dislike, even hate.

The thought of the experiment burst through Thornbold's preoccupation with his obsession.

"It is quite possible," he said eagerly. "I'll show you. Even without all the power—" He broke off and turned to his desk and formulae.

Now we were helpless to do more than stand and watch him work. But I began to get some idea of the intricate, delicate mechanism that could pick out a given spot twenty-five miles square on the surface of the earth, twenty-five thousand miles in circumference, and aim a beam like a gun. It was a colossal problem to think about.

He worked the latitude and longitude of a point fifty miles west of Quito. With this he consulted a four-foot globe of polished Indian, engraved with meridians and parallels down to the last quarter-minute. Above this, attached to some intricate mechanism, was a magnifying eyepiece that had crossed hairs on it like a bomb-sight. He spun the globe slowly until the crossed hairs of the eyepiece centered on the spot off Quito. This, I learned, was computing not only the position of the earth in relation to the sphere, but also charted the curved beam of the heat ray.

To this he now added the exact orbit of the sun and its relation to the sphere and the earth, and their particular position at the exact instant Greenwich time that he wished to throw the beam. When he knew the sun's, the earth's and the sphere's relation to each other, he decided the warp of the sphere to cast the light beam. He had also to calculate a stop-movement that—when the heat beam came on the target—would turn the sphere to the sun but keep the heat beam always on the fixed spot.

Staggering mathematical formulae! A single human mind was holding in precise balance the vast sun, the earth, and a tiny man-made satellite two thousand miles up. And utilizing these to throw a one-hundred-and-fifty-million horsepower beam of light like a cannon projectile.



"Ah, Signor Braxton," he said, "perhaps I shall persuade you after all."

Would it work? If it didn't, then the making of a parabola spider-web was useless.

I looked out at the earth, modestly hidden in white, and misty until it seemed a cotton ball slowly moving through the blackness of eternity. The sun with its blue-white face and streaming corona of orange flames, was blinding.

Thornbold was gazing into the prism of a thirty-inch telescope that would follow the heat-beam as a range-finder follows a shell. We were silent, tense.

Now he pulled at two brass handles, and I felt the whole sphere vibrate as the enormous inertia motors began to spin. The floor moved alarmingly under my feet. Watching the panel board in front of Thornbold, I saw the needle of the dials move in consonance. And at last they were all in alignment, pointing to the figure two. Thornbold gave a cry of excited satisfaction, and leaped to the telescope, which had automatically been aimed as the ray was aimed.

"It's all cloud," he shouted. "I can see nothing."

He stepped back, and I seized the instant to take a look for myself. Due to the enormous speed of the satellite, I could at first see only a swirl of white. It was close—the telescope was of such power that it brought the earth's surface to within two miles. Then Thornbold pressed the regulating mechanism, and the swirl stopped, and I saw

clouds—thick rain-clouds. And on this the tremendous beam of dazzling light reflected blindingly. It held steady because now, despite our movement, despite the movement of the earth and of the sun, the adjustment mechanism made proper compensation, as a boy's hand regulates a mirror to cast a beam.

But nothing was happening.

Nothing did happen! Just cloud-swirl.

It was bitter disappointment. I realized now how intensely I had hoped. Susan saw the look as I stepped back. Her lips moved, but she did not speak. Thornbold said: "Perhaps time is needed—although by the formula we should have pierced the clouds."

Egstrom said: "A flat surface will not make a strong enough beam. I have calculated."

I saw in some surprise that he was staring hard at Susan.

At that moment Mike Malloy and Jasper left the chamber. I said to Susan quietly: "You'll have to work on him to make some new equations. Somehow, that's got to work."

She nodded, puzzled. "I don't understand. I've seen what unfiltered rays will do and—" She interrupted herself: "Jasper wants you."

I went out into the next chamber. Jasper and Malloy stood there with an Indian—I was later told his name was José. He had on space-armor, with his helmet off.

And in Mike Malloy's hand was a Savage .30-.30 rifle.

I looked quickly at Jasper. He nodded.

"Believe it or not, it came back. This guy just grabbed it out of the air while he was working on Girder Six."

Mike said: "Whoever was after shooting heaved it, and it made its orbit and just came back."

I knew that by the laws of celestial mechanics, objects cannot deviate from the given orbit. But I had never expected this piece of luck.*

"Whose is it?" I asked Malloy.

He shook his head. "Faith, and who can tell? There are no firearms allowed here. It was smuggled in. It might be anybody."

"Pepito?" I asked.

"That sullen devil! You'll not get his mouth open even if you cut his tongue out."

Both Malloy and Jasper looked at their fists, so I didn't ask more about that. Besides, I had an idea. I went to the door and summoned Susan.

"Got any face-powder?"

She smiled. "And some lipsticks and rouge. Why?"

She gave me the powder kit, and I took the fluffy puff and carefully went over the rifle, dusting it.

"There's just a chance," I said, "that the guy neglected to wipe it down. He didn't figure it would ever come back."

There were prints there, those of the Indian José, Malloy's—and two more sets on stock and barrel.

"We're going to fingerprint everybody here," I said; "then we'll have a killer."

I looked around, saw Egstrom.

"Help round up the men," I told him. "We'll fingerprint ourselves and then them."

"But how," he objected, "could anybody smuggle a rifle—"

From the observatory came a shout of triumphant glee. "It works!" It was Thornbold yelling. "The counter-movement's begun. It's a cyclical storm."

Still holding the rifle, I ran to him. He was peering through the eyepiece and mumbling excitedly.

*Braxton uses the wrong word in *luck*. The rifle *had* to return to the spot whence it was cast. A few degrees variation would occur each time it made its circuit as a tiny satellite, but after so many revolutions it would reach the precise point of departure. If any luck was involved, it was that a workman on the grid was near enough to the precise spot of departure at the exact instant of return.

"Look, David," he cried, "there is what your father prophesied!"

I put my eye to the prism.

"My God!" I muttered.

I was seeing, forming under my very eyes, a cyclical storm of hurricane dimensions at its center. At this distance it looked like an enormous waterspout: A center of whirling winds and rain, and twisting so swiftly that it seemed a long polished tube. The water beneath had been whipped—serrated ridges of white of jagged saw-tooth shape.

I knew what had happened, then. The heat-beam had created a warm current of air that rushed upward, and a cold wave had gone down, and there had been friction with the existing rain which had been made into a torrential downpour. This had speeded up the circular draft of hot and cool air, until now it was spinning with hurricane velocity. A real hurricane of twenty-odd miles across that—started by man—would now be augmented by nature.

And I saw something else. The submarine aircraft-carrier was foundering.

It had not moved from its original position, and had apparently surfaced to discharge more of the planes. And because this was an artificial storm that would not immediately register on the barometer, the officers had been surprised, and they had been unable to refasten the elevator hatches in the take-off deck. I could even see a few white spots that must have been airplanes blown off the deck.

"She's sinking!" I yelled. "By God, that'll show Della Gracchi what we've got!"

Suddenly behind me Malloy yelled. There was a stunning shot.

Susan screamed: "David—look out!"

Jasper gave a yell. I jumped back from the telescope and whirled. Egstrom stood there in Clavex uniform, a gun in his hand, his back to the machinery housing.

"Get your hands up, all of you," he snarled, "or you'll get Malloy's end."

Malloy lay on the floor, his face blown in by a slug.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



OBODY moved. There was a dead silence broken only by the rhythmic click of the galactic coordinate computer.

I was looking at Egstrom with new eyes, and I saw we had been fools.

"You aren't Egstrom," I said. "You stabbed him in the Quito alley. You ran because you hadn't had time to get his picture out of his passport and get in your own."

He grinned savagely.

"Your astuteness is astounding," he sneered.

His left hand snaked out, jerked the brass knob. The heat beam was released and no longer held steady on the cyclical storm.

"You radioed Della Gracchi," I said. "You told him what was here. He didn't know before, and that's why he put on the hurry."

He merely grinned. I heard a retching sob. It was Thornbold, who had looked at Malloy's dead face.

"So," I said, "you made your move because it's your fingerprints on the rifle. Pepito told you about Quexl."

"Not Pepito," snarled Egstrom; "he's only one."

"This gets you no place," I said. "Even if you've got more, there are too many of us. Drop the gun."

"Don't be a fool," he flashed. "I'm taking over."

I crouched slightly. "Drop the gun," I repeated.

"David—please—no!" Susan whispered.

"Wait, Dave," Jasper called. "We'll get our chance."

I didn't answer, just set myself. There was too much riding the line to let Egstrom pull this.



Della Gracchi, out there in a bomber. . . . For once, he was too late.

"You heard me," I said. "Are you putting down that gun?"

He was rigid, eyes blazing.

"Manuell! Ramon!" he suddenly yelled. "Make ready."

"Take him on that side, Jasper," I said.

And when Jasper moved, and Egstrom's blazing eyes shifted slightly, I took off. It was a low forward dive, hands out.

Any man is a fool to jump a gun in the hands of a man ready and willing to use it. But sometimes, like this, you have to be a fool; and sometimes the charge of a man will disconcert the man behind the trigger. Everything looked sweet for a split-second.

Jasper had lunged. My one hand was reaching for the gun-arm. We were within a heart-beat of success. Then that automatic seemed to blaze in my very face. I saw the fire, but I never heard the explosion. I didn't hear anything. My charge landed in a bed of blankness.

If you've ever seen these comic-strip characters who get hit on the head and see comets, moons, suns and planetoids, you'll have some idea of the inside of my skull. I was dodging meteors, and when it seemed they must blast me into oblivion, they'd turn into Susan's lovely face, and I'd see her gorgeous eyes, her soft crimson mouth, the erect slimmness of her body.

Then I'd be parched, and yelling for water, and trying to steer a rocket gone mad on the loose. Finally there came a moment when I opened my eyes and just saw the cubicle where Jasper and I slept. There was a cold compress on my head, and I had a headache a yard wide.

Susan, wan and pale, was wringing out a new compress. "Aspirin would be better," I said.

She turned with a start. Tears started; her mouth trembled; but she fought back her emotion.

"David," she said, "oh, how could you have been so crazy as to try it?"

I remembered then—I, and Jasper—

"How's Jasper?" I said weakly.

"Almost as bad as you. In the shoulder."

I groaned. "And Egstrom?"

"He took the TX-2, David, and he's gone. The air-locks are bolted from the outside—and he's gone."

The realization that we were trapped, prisoners, made my head pound.

"He's going to capture the sphere," I muttered. "He's gone for help. But"—I started erect—"he doesn't know astronautics or rockets. Maybe he can't make it."

"He's been gone twenty-six hours," she said dully.

That made me wince. Twenty-six hours on my back, with the world blowing up in our faces.

"But the other rocket is still here—the TX-1?"

"No! He cut the magnetic switch and set it adrift. And he's bolted us in. We can't get out, even to bury poor Malloy."

The news was crushing.

"We've got to get out," I said grimly. "He's coming back. We've got to stop him from hooking on."

"David, you can't get out. And—we're marooned in space. If Egstrom crashes, we'll die here."

I had thought of that too. We'd live until food, oxygen and water gave out.

"Give me my clothes," I said.

She gave me my clothes and went out. I was weak as a cat at first, and there was a gutter of flesh out of my

scalp as wide as your little finger. But I fought into my clothes, and presently when I went out to the main chamber, the dizzy spells had passed.

Jasper sat glumly. There were eight Indians. Susan saw my glance.

"The rest were outside! They—they couldn't get in, and they're gone. They floated away when their oxygen gave out."

I shivered. That was a Clavex trick, all right. I asked where Dr. Thornbold was; she pushed open a door. I could hear Thornbold singing in a cracked, off-key voice:

God's in His Heaven,
All's right with the world.

"His mind seems all gone," she said. "He just stays there and adds and subtracts—and sings. Oh, David!"

It was laughter, tears merging into tragic sound, and I grabbed her and shook her sharply.

"Hold it, Susan," I said. "You'll have to save it."

She quieted, then. "Sorry," she said.

I went over to Jasper. His arm was in a sling.

"He was the quickest guy on the trigger I ever saw," he said sadly. "You and I both hit the deck together."

But he could move the arm after a fashion, and with the Indians we went to the air-locks. It was a wasted effort. They were hermetically sealed from the outside. The sphere walls were double-thickness beryllium-welded copper. We needed a blow-torch to cut a way through. That would mean our own instant death.

Silently we filed back to the main chamber. The knowledge that we were trapped sickened me. The fact that the Clavex would have this sphere and all its power was undurable.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, an idea leaped into my mind. "Twenty-six hours," I muttered. "Did Egstrom turn loose the TX-1 right away?"

"Yes," said Susan.

"Then it's got to come back somewhere close," I half-shouted. "Just like that rifle. On some swing, it will come right up to the girders."

"Sure," said Jasper, "but you can't get out there to catch it."

"Susan, let's get your uncle to work out the formula. If we know when the TX-1 will return, we can put on space-armor and blast a hole through the side."

It was a wild chance, but the only one I could see. We went to Thornbold.

HE sat figuring and singing; one look told me the shock of murder before his eyes had broken the last thread of his connection with reality. He had longed for escape; now he had it with his plotting of projected space trips to fixed stars that were a million light-years away.

He spoke to me cheerfully: "David, why not a tour of the major planets in our solar system? Jupiter, for example. Now, I've plotted the orbit—" He rattled off figures.

It was pitiful, and I let Susan wheedle him into the equation of a rocket drifting at four miles a second in a fifteen-degree arc away from us.

"Hm! Toward the earth, you say," he said. "There will be no gravitation error but—" He mumbled and figured, and we waited.

But I never did hear him give the final figures.

A few moments later I heard a muffled drum of intermittent sound—the roar of a rocket motor. For an instant I didn't believe it. Egstrom didn't know that much about astronautics and rockets.

But Susan said: "Look, David! There it is."

The fused quartz bull's-eye showed me the slim needle of steel.

I swore and jerked a hasty question to Jasper: "Where's the rifle? Any gun?"

"There aint any, Dave. Egstrom and his monkeys took them all."

We ran out to the main chamber, but that was all the good it did. I had picked up a bar of beryllium and walked toward the air-lock when it opened.

The first man through was Rodolpho Della Gracchi, gay in the black-and-gold uniform of a Clavex colonel. His smile was broad, his odd blue eyes blazing strangely.

"Ah, Signor Braxton," he said. "Now, perhaps, I shall persuade you after all."

He had only a dirk and pistol at his belt. But behind him came black-garbed storm troops. They had pistols and submachine-guns, and they meant business.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



ND now," said Della Gracchi, "sit down, all please, and we shall talk." He was in Dr. Thornbold's cubicle, in Thornbold's chair and he was very pleased with himself. And not without reason. In three hours he had distributed his storm troops throughout the sphere. He was in complete control, and utterly safe from all earthly attack. From him I learned that Douglas had got the Panama Airwing there too late.

"They will find some burned planes, that is all." Della Gracchi smiled. "Von Eggert, whom you know as Egstrom, has told me how, godlike, you made the wind sink the aircraft-carrier *Nautilus*."

His voice became ringing.

"You cut off our retreat, Braxton, but that made no difference. I had heard from Von Eggert, and I should not have retreated in any case. And I, Della Gracchi, say to you that the discovery of this miracle Outer Station is worth the sinking of fifty *Nautilus*es."

"Then," I said, "since you know— Well, what can be done?"

"Ever since Von Eggert radioed, I have moved faster than a man of my bulk likes to, but—the result is monumental."

He still thought so as we sat in Dr. Thornbold's cubicle. A storm trooper guarded me from behind with pointed gun. Susan, Jasper and the others were kept elsewhere. Della Gracchi had with him a smallish, fat, square-headed man named Inar von Manteuffel. He had "*ached*" and "*Gotted*" all over the sphere, and now he had a mass of notes, and Della Gracchi wanted to deal with me. I waited silently.

"Now, Braxton," Della Gracchi said, "I shall be very frank with you. My men will at once begin to curve the girders and trusses of this most ingenious mirror. Professor Von Manteuffel has calculated the right paraboloid. With that you cannot interfere. With my use of it to bring the American Government to terms, you also are helpless. In short, I, alone, here, can make the Clavex cause triumphant. Perhaps with only a burning to ashes of—say, Washington."

He paused. I did not speak.

"But that, my dear fellow, is far from being enough. Europe and the Clavex must—must, I repeat—have two things: Such a sphere—and, most of all, Dr. Thornbold's secret of stabilizing fifth-atom hydrogen."

I looked up quickly and then down again.

"And so I make an agreement," he smiled. "You will persuade Dr. Thornbold to give us his figures. You will aid the curving of the girders. In return, you shall all be Knights of the Clavex Empire, pensioned, honored as only we know how to honor world genius."

The impulse to tell him no and to hell with him was hot on my tongue. But events had helped me curb my temper. The situation was grave, but not yet hopeless.

"Dr. Thornbold has had a shock," I forced myself to say. "He is mildly insane."

"So I gathered," Della Gracchi said. "Sometimes a man can be persuaded out of his insanity by—well, physical suffering."

The swinel He was throwing in the threat gratis. But I took it with clenched teeth.

"I wouldn't." I forced myself to speak casually. "He alone knows how to make that electrostatic field. You do anything to his mind—and you've lost it for good and all."

"I believe you." He jerked forward in the seat. "But there is the niece—I hold the cards. Do you work with me?"

"How do I know you will keep your word?" I was hot and sweating, hands clenched, and my voice was thick.

He said sharply: "I am a gentleman. You do not lightly question the parole of my quality."

I thought hard. To defy him was stupid, would cut off the last single chance to beat him that still remained.

"All right," I said, "we'll work with you. But nothing happens to Thornbold or Susan."

"Ah, Susan!" he chuckled. "I see where the wind lies." He settled back. "I do not trust you, Braxton. You will cooperate as long as it suits your purpose. Do your end, and you will have no fault with mine."

I rose to go.

This fattish Dr. von Manteuffel, who had remained hitherto silent, now said: "*Ach*, Herr Braxton, tell me this, *bitte*. The electrostatic stabilizer accumulates a reserve field. Presuming a break-down, how long would the reserve hold the—*the*—pentahyzone you call it, *nicht wahr*? How long does the pentahyzone remain in stability?"

There was no harm in answering truthfully.

"It varies, I believe, between five and seven hours—depending on the strength of the field, like the charge in a storage battery. The maximum is seven hours."

"*Ach!*" said Von Manteuffel, and fell furiously to figuring.

Della Gracchi waved me out. I went, smiling mirthlessly. If that tubby German expected a clue to the electrostatic equation by the length of its reserve, he was guessing badly.

In the main chamber Von Eggert was talking to Susan. He was most resplendent now in the glittering uniform of a Clavex major of engineers.

He was boasting: "In twenty days, do you hear? That is Clavex efficiency. In twenty days this will be a parabola—and we shall startle the world with frying and burning your capital and your silly leaders."

I was passing by, trying to give Susan a signal. I wanted to find out what Dr. Thornbold's calculations were on the return orbit of TX-1.

Von Eggert said: "Come here."

I paused near them. Susan's glance was frightened, yet pleading. I didn't understand.

WITHOUT warning, Von Eggert suddenly lashed out with his fist. It was totally unexpected; I had no chance to duck. The sweeping blow caught me flush on the jaw.

I had the silly sensation of looking up at my feet over my head. Not yet recovered from the bullet-groove in my skull, it was seconds before I could stagger to my feet. Then wild fury swept me. I crouched, glared at him.

He had his hand on his dirk. A slight smile played across his thin mouth. With a sudden shock I realized he was baiting me, hoping I'd jump him.

My brain fought down the wild anger within me. It was one of the worst struggles of my life. It actually caused a physical jerk of my body as the brain stepped in to prevent my immediate intention of bashing his face in.

I stood panting, my face pale.

Suddenly Von Eggert laughed. "You see, Susan, now he is no longer the insolent leader he appeared."

I was grateful then to him for that bragging statement. I actually came near laughing. All his actions were now clear. He had been jealous of my influence with Dr.

Thornbold, of Susan's friendship. He wanted only to show off before her, reveal his power.

I turned deliberately and walked to the cubicle where Jasper was awkwardly fixing a new sling for his arm.

He gazed at me in alarm: "Boy, don't look so murderous at me."

That completed it. I laughed, and helped him with his sling. The laugh made my jaw hurt.

"Jasper," I said, "I just got knocked kicking—and took it. Mark that one for the book."

I didn't see Susan until over an hour later. There were two guards in the air-lock chamber, but nonetheless she seized my hand, pressed it hard.

"David, that was the bravest thing I ever saw you do."

"Your words are headache remedies," I flushed. Then: "What were Dr. Thornbold's computations on the TX-1?"

The momentary exaltation fled from her pale features. "He didn't finish it, David," she faltered. "He—he can't seem to concentrate. He gets halfway through—then does something else."

It was a tougher blow than Von Eggert's sock to the chin. Without knowing when or if the TX-1 would return, my last hope of forestalling Della Gracchi was gone.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



IT is amazing what a man can learn to endure if he has to. And I don't mean physical punishment, but mental agony, which is a thousandfold worse. After that sock by Von Eggert, not a hand was laid on me or Jasper in the terrible days that followed. But to watch the feverish activity outside by those Clavex troopers, to see day by day the creation of that deadly paraboloid was enough to make a man berserk.

And it was such a helpless fury. A dozen times Susan had tried to get Thornbold to give us the orbit calculation of TX-1, and each time he never completed it, gave us no answer.

I had schemed for hours, seeking a way to seize the TX-2 and maroon Della Gracchi and his gang on the Outer Station. But he was well aware of this danger, and a half-dozen big troopers with drawn weapons guarded it night and day. Neither Jasper nor I, nor any of the surviving Indians, were permitted within yards of the air-lock to which the TX-2 was attached.

When Jasper and I worked outside on the spider-web—this was seldom—a guard in space-armor stood over us. Della Gracchi overlooked nothing to keep us completely helpless.

Under Von Manteuffel's calculations, men bent the main girders until they curved like the prongs of a huge fork. There had been two thousand square yards of duraluminite sheets in the sphere. These were riveted in place and sprayed with the rest of the liquid sodium. The forming parabola was now three-quarters covered, and I had heard Von Manteuffel say that the concentrated beam of unfiltered sun rays would have a heat content of 24,000 degrees Centigrade. This would melt stone and consume the very soil.

On the sixteenth day Jasper came into the cubicle, trembling.

"My God, Dave," he muttered. "I just heard the radio in Della Gracchi's office. What do you think?"

I shook my head. "What?"

"The Clavex warships have sunk four merchant ships and the protecting cruiser *Charlestown*."

A weight seemed to land on my shoulders and bent me over. I couldn't even swear. In a horrified tone Jasper told me the dreadful details.

The convoy had been on its way to Sydney, Australia, with munitions, because Australia and New Zealand were loyal to the Anglo-American pact of the Western Hemis-

phere. Due to the sudden militant outbursts of both Ernst Boehm and Alexander Wufang, the cruiser *Charlestown* was escorting. Out of nowhere came the Clavex battle-ships *Genoa* and *Madgeburg*. These immediately engaged the *Charlestown*. Clavex flotillas of submarines and destroyers had torpedoed and sunk all the merchantmen. Outraged, outgunned, the *Charlestown* had fought as long as her guns would bear. Under smoke-screen she had three times charged to a range close enough for her smaller guns to register hits. She had actually crippled the *Genoa*, so that it limped away from the battle down by the head, and with a heavy list to starboard.

But the *Madgeburg* got in a sixteen-inch salvo that blew up the *Charlestown's* ammunition stores. And the *Charlestown* had sunk twenty minutes later with all hands. The captain, James A. Drain, had gone down with her, and his last act had been to radio a terse account of the informal battle.

"It's war, Dave," muttered Jasper. "The commentator said America had mobilized. Congress has met in special session. The Anglo-American Western Hemisphere Ministry is in session now. The Clavex representatives in the United States are under arrest."

For a moment we were both silent, visualizing the final savage hemisphere struggle, the century's war to the death. "Yes," I said finally. "It's war, Jasper—and it means Boehm has been told of this sphere and its powers and is going ahead now."

Jasper nodded. "What can we do? God, Dave, we've got to do something."

"Do what?" I muttered. "Just name it!"

Sometimes you can almost hear the tired wheels of your brain grinding over the same old futile circle. I could hear mine now. Night after night, hour after hour, I tried to find some way—no matter the risk—to block Della Gracchi's use of the sphere. I ground over the same empty circle now.

While we thus stood silent, a big burly guard came to the door.

"Herr Oberst Della Gracchi wants you," he said, "At once."

I kept my face impassive, said to Jasper: "You might find out from Susan if she has learned those orbit figures."

He knew what I meant. The guard's eyes were on me. But the words seemed innocent. He gestured, and I went to Della Gracchi's cubicle. Another guard trailed me.

DELLA GRACCHI was in tremendous spirits. "MacGregor has told you the news? That is why I let him overhear. You are shocked, yes?"

I perceived now he had let Jasper tell me in order to soften me up for something.

"Boehm is sticking his neck out," I said. "He'll have a real war on his hands."

"He was a little premature," said Della Gracchi, "but then, he is a *parvenu*. He has not the balance to be a great world leader. He has gifts, but he is of peasant stock."

I gave Della Gracchi a guarded look. This sounded like disloyalty. He intercepted it, and shrugged smilingly.

"My dear fellow, do not look surprised. We have submitted to Boehm's leadership because he is the passionate amalgam to bind together many forces to make a striking power. He is a tool for us who wish to make a new world to our own liking. Just as, until now, we allied with that half-caste Wufang, because he was a tool to help the reshaping."

I had a hunch then what kind of a bug had bitten Della Gracchi. But I made no comment and waited.

"Von Manteuffel's report, conjoined with mine," Della Gracchi said, "swept Boehm off his feet. He sees no further use for Wufang—and rightly—and intends to establish this as a personal victory. The Anglo-Americans beaten, he will also bring Wufang to heel."

"And," I said, "you intend to step in and oust Boehm."

"Precisely," he nodded. "His oracular amalgam is no longer needed. His false theories can now be swept aside." He waved his arm around the cubicle. "This makes him dispensable." He leaned forward. "There is one—and only one—principle on which this earth can continue its advancement, Braxton."

I regarded him curiously, because he was suddenly nervously excited. His odd blue eyes blazed.

"From man's beginning, there has always been a ruling class. In it were gathered the brains, the blood, the courage and the will to dominate.

"In Europe we have always known that. Despite the cloak of so-called democracy, England had a ruling class up until the British Isles fell in 1951. France had a ruling class, Germany, Italy—all the inheritors of civilization. Concessions were made to other classes, but never when they interfered with the ruling class."

He paused, absorbed in his passionate consideration.

"That is why the United States became the greatest enemy of civilization. The United States, alone, with its philosophy, has brought the world to the brink of ruin.

"Why? Because the United States has from the first held that humankind should be ruled by laws and not men. They have held that the ignorant many should control the intelligent few. In the United States you see constant breeding between all classes. This rejection of selected breeding has produced few geniuses and a high percentage of morons."

IT was almost impossible to believe that this excited man could dish out this nonsense and do it with the passionate devotion of a fanatic. Yet in his excitement he was actually sweating.

"The United States attacks the one foundation of society," he cried, "the selective breeding of the ruling class. By giving general education, it trains its masses to seek higher levels."

He jumped to his feet. "And our first rulings shall abolish education for the peasant classes. It gives them dangerous thoughts and discontent. They shall be trained to work for food, bed and loyalty to the masters. Through the ruling class, we shall breed a race of supermen."

I was disgusted enough. These silly ideas had been advanced since 1914, and too many men had died because of them.

"Did you call me in here to tell me this drivel?" I said. He started as if stung. "Drivel? You dare to call the one salvation of man's future drivel?"

His lips skinned back wolfishly and his glance was ugly. Then suddenly he shrugged.

"The growth of science is based on inherited characteristics. Men like you belong to the ruling group because of your special knowledge that we need."

He rose, tinkered with the short-wave broadcasting radio that he had had moved to Thornbold's cubicle.

"I wonder why," he mused, "I take the trouble to persuade you. Well, we shall see."

He paused, turned.

"Now," he said harshly, his manner dominating, "I am arranging to reach your friend Douglas, in Washington. When I have him, you will tell him the situation here. You will tell him if the United States does not cease mobilization, recall its Atlantic fleet, appoint representatives to confer with Ernst Boehm for the entry of the United States into the Clavex, we will burn Washington to ashes."

He glanced at a gold-and-diamond-encrusted wrist-watch—not sidereal time.

"At exactly 2:05 P.M. tomorrow, Eastern Standard Time, I will turn this parabolic heat refraction on Washington."

He smiled into my tight, gray face.

"Herr Von Manteuffel assures me the mirror is sufficiently bent for a preliminary demonstration—and he is familiar with the er-range-finding equipment."

This story concludes in the forthcoming May issue.

Soldier Stuff

A writer who has fought in many wars tells of a Missouri pilgrim's military progress.

by TRACY
RICHARDSON

I'D been working on one of the old tractors Pa used to haul limestone to the kiln. It had broken down and been pronounced beyond repair. I'd got it going in a way that surprised me, and I was feeling pretty good about it. Just as I'd got the carburetor off so I could figure out what I'd done to it to make it run so fine, Jeb Stone and his sister Annie May came along in their brand-new car. They stopped to talk—that is, Jeb did; Annie May just wanted to fuss. She looked at me disgusted-like because I was all covered with grease and wanted to know when I am going to quit being a hillbilly and go to the city and get me a real job.

Annie May is just about the prettiest thing in the Ozarks. I'd carried her schoolbooks for her ever since we had been in the primary grades and on up through high school. Down in the Ozarks that's the way most courtships are carried out; and when you finish or quit school, you just get married as a matter of course.

I'd never talked to Annie May about getting married, for she'd always said she would never marry up at no time with a hillbilly without ambition. She was sore because when I graduated from high school I'd stayed on Dad's farm and tinkered around with his old tractors and trucks.

Jeb says as how they are going to Springfield to take in the county fair, but most of all they are going to see the airplanes that are advertised to be there. That interests me very much, because I have been studying in one of my books about the motors they have in them airplanes. I don't care so much about the flying, but I would like to see their motors, for maybe I'd learn something that would help me with the motors in Dad's trucks and tractors. Annie May don't know it, but I've already made fifteen hundred dollars this year fooling around with those old motors and getting them in such good shape that Dad don't have to buy new ones.

So I say to Jeb and Annie that I think it will be a good idea for me to go to Springfield too, and see the fair and the airplanes, as I have never seen one of them close up.



I say to him: "O.K., Sergeant, we'll try it out again a week from tonight."



Jeb says as how I might as well go with them in their new automobile, but Annie May says no; they aint got the time to wait until I get all the grease scrubbed off, as no doubt that would take a week at least—and anyway she don't want to go to town with a hillbilly who wears overalls all the time.

So they drive on, and I wonder what's got into Annie May that makes her so hard to get along with. It looks as though should I want to get married up with her, I'd have to learn to be a gentleman first, and I'd hate to have to watch myself all the time and talk real proper, for I just don't think right when I have to watch myself too close. Anyway, what's the use of talk-

Annie May looked at me disgusted-like and wanted to know when I am going to quit being a hillbilly.

ing real proper English when the people around you don't know what you're saying and think you're stuck up and getting above your raising?

So when they drive off, I take the carburetor and go to the house. I scrub myself clean and tell Dad that I am taking the old Lizzie I have fixed up and am going in to Springfield to see the fair.

Dad's a right fair-minded sort of person, and he says go ahead as I'm my own boss anyway, and there's no one else on the place can drive the old

flivver, what with all the gadgets I've managed to put on it. And then he says he had noticed Jeb and Annie May were driving a new car, and perhaps it is time I got a new automobile for myself. "Son," he says, "I don't know what you do with your money, but if you haven't got enough for a new car, I'll help out a bit, and I'll also help you to fix up a new house on that east hundred and twenty if you're fixing to get married up with Annie May Stone."

So I got to tell Dad true that I am not thinking any such thoughts, because Annie May has intentions of marrying up with a gentleman, and she says I'm nothing but a hillbilly, even if I don't know how to make

music on a whisky jug or a comb with a piece of paper folded over it.

Dad slaps me on the back and says that maybe I aint no gentleman but then he don't think I'm a fool either, and he expects I'll make a better living and keep a better home than a lot of gentlemen he's known in his time.

Ma comes out to the wash-bench where Dad and I are talking, and says she had my new suit all pressed up and ready for me, and that she hopes I will have a good time at the fair. I know that Ma has ideas that I am going to marry up with Annie May, and I hate to disappoint her, but I tell her that my nice new suit would be kind of out of place in the flivver, and anyway I want to take a look at some motors, and the clothes would get all ruined with grease so I'll just wear my overalls and that way I won't disappoint Annie May.

Mother says I'm just a stubborn calf and she don't blame Annie May for not wanting to get married up with me. But I know that Mother is just kidding, for she has never succeeded in making a gentleman of Father, but I aint heard her kicking about the home he built for her and all the fancy fixings she's got, which are as good or better than she had at home even if she did live in the city until she came to the Ozarks to teach school and Dad saw her and married up with her right away, and I know she has never been sorry.

SO I drove the flivver to Springfield, and I'm there almost as soon as Jeb and Annie May in their new automobile, for it's new and they can't drive very fast, and I've got the flivver all fixed up with high compression and a direct-feed carburetor I've worked out, and it travels so fast I have the back end filled with sandbags to keep it on the road at all. I drive in and park alongside of Jeb's new car, and Annie May turns up her nose at me and the Lizzie and says in a very high-hatted way that she knows always makes me hopping mad: "Hillbilly, why don't you get an automobile?"

I like Annie May very much, and I had thought that some day I'd marry up with her, but maybe I aint feeling so good today or something, for I get kind of peeved, and I says to her and her brother, who is not to blame at all, that maybe the Lizzie aint so much for looks but perhaps she is like a lot of people who don't wear their goodness on the outside to cover up the badness inside. And I went on to tell them that I'd bet that any expert would pay more for the Lizzie just as she stood than he would for their new and up-to-date car, which had most of its good points in a new shiny coat of enamel paint.

Jeb's a mighty sensible sort of a boy and he don't say anything, but Annie

May flares up and says she'd like to bet most anything against one of the Airedale pups I was raising that any expert wouldn't give my old wreck a second thought, but at that it seemed good enough for its driver.

About that time I noticed a soldier man standing there, and he was laughing like all get-out, and when he saw that I had noticed him, he comes over and he salutes Annie May in the way that gentlemen always salute women, and he says real polite-like that he is Captain Wolf, an engineering officer of the United States Army Air Service, and that they had stopped off here at the fair to let the people of Missouri see what kind of airplanes the Army had to protect the country. He goes on to say that as he was considered an expert on motors, he would be tickled most to death to help the young lady win herself one of the Airedale pups, and maybe she'd like to go for a ride in one of the airplanes afterwards.

Annie May's really a very modest sort of girl, and she got red in the face and tried to back out, and she said she would much rather I give her one of the puppies of my own free will.

I'm still sore about all her high-hatted goings-on, so I say a bet is a bet, and that Willie Dunne was always willing to back up his boast, and she'd lose anyway, for I knew the flivver was worth more than their new car, and what was more I owned it from the crank to the tail-light and knew every bolt and nut on her.

Annie May gets mad all over again. "I guess the haywire on it is worth a lot!" she spits out, and then she says she'd be tickled to death to let Captain Wolf, an Army officer and a gentleman, decide which was the most valuable car, and she'd name the pup Hillbilly, and perhaps she could make a gentleman of it, which was more than could be done with some people from Missouri. And furthermore she'd be pleased pink to take a ride in the airplane with Captain Wolf, and perhaps he could come out to their country place and partake of fried chicken and watermelon. And I'm thinking that perhaps I'd gone and let my temper get the best of me, but I just had to stand up for the flivver and I was going to give Annie May one of the pups, anyway.

That Captain Wolf didn't lose any time. He just says there is not the least room for argument, and that the new automobile was worth fifty of the Lizzies, for you could pick up a flivver on almost any garbage dump for nothing at all. He says that I now owe an Airedale pup named Hillbilly to Miss Annie May, and he certainly was anticipating the fried chicken and watermelon. But at that this Captain Wolf was a fair judge, and he says to me that if I know of any reason why he should not render judgment in favor

of the new and up-to-date car, now was the time for me to speak or forever hold my peace, and get ready to give up the Airedale pup.

So I said to him that I wonder would he judge his liquor by the bottle that was wrapped around it, or by the way he felt the next morning. The Captain looked at me sort of surprised-like, and he says with a friendly grin: "Son, you've got something there. After all, beauty's only skin deep. We'll try them out and see if this jalopy has hidden virtues to compensate for her lack of pulchritude."

THE Captain gets into the new automobile with Jeb and Annie May, and they drove around the race-track where they hold the trotting races; and when they come back, they were all laughing as though they knew some good joke, and the way they acted, I guess they thought it was me. And the Captain says they sure have got a great car, but that the jalopy was good in its day too, many years ago.

It looks like I aint got a chance, hardly, but I let him get in back of the steering-wheel, and he don't have a bit of luck getting it started on account of some of the gadgets I've got on it. When he gets tired trying and doing his best not to cuss in front of Annie May, who is sitting there making more remarks about hillbillies, he asks me to change places with him, as anyway he can tell more about a machine by watching than he can by driving. As we roll around the track, I explain to him some of the things I have put on the flivver, and he gets real interested, so he tells me to drive around again. He says: "Is this as fast as the buggy can go?"

I stepped on the gas, and the Lizzie almost jumped out from under us, and the Captain yells, "Oh my God!" sort of startled-like, and then he grins like he was kind of ashamed of himself, and he settled down and hangs on grim-like and never says another word until we circle the track twice and get back to the parking-place.

The Captain sat still for almost five minutes, and don't say a word even to answer Annie May's chatter. Then he gets out and raises his hand to his cap in a salute, and he turns to Annie May and says solemn-like: "Lady, I can't say that I know what it's all about, and I sure do hate to miss that chicken dinner, and I just love watermelon, but you don't get the Airedale pup this time." Then he turns to me. "Son, I want to see what makes the damned thing function."

Annie May didn't have a thing to say after that; she just stuck her nose up in the air and walked off. Jeb hung around, for he was a good scout and was glad to know that I really did have something under the hood of that pile of so-called junk.



The Sergeant yells something but I don't get it, for a piece of paper flew up and hit him in the mouth.

So we peeled our shirts and got down into the guts of the Lizzie, and I explained to the Captain the working of the forced-feed pump and the carburetor I had made, and then he called a sergeant over from one of the airplanes, and they put their heads together and cussed a whole lot, and the Sergeant said it couldn't be done and the Captain says for him not to be a damned fool just because he's been in the army for twenty years—that it *has* been done. Then he asks me if I would mind very much giving the Sergeant a whirl around the race-track, and if it was all the same to me would I give him a quick start-off and a fast ride around.

So I shot the gas to the Lizzie real quick, and she took off from a standing start, and the Sergeant yells something but I don't get what he is trying to say, for a piece of paper flew up and hit him in the mouth, and by the time he'd got it off, we were back at the parking-place.

The Sergeant jumps out of the flivver, and he looks at the Captain like he was going to say something he'd be sorry for, and the Captain was trying hard to not laugh at him. Then the Sergeant turns to me and he says, sort of prayerful-like: "*Mister, if God just gives me one wish it will be to get you into my outfit in the army.*"

I couldn't exactly figure out why he should want to get me in the army, in his or any other outfit, but we'd been hearing a lot about this draft lately, and Dad had said two or three times that he thought this country of ours was worth fighting for, and that and what the Sergeant said sort of put ideas into my head.

The Captain asks the Sergeant what he thinks of the motor, and the Sergeant says: "Sir, I'm not exactly fit to talk to an officer right now, but anyway I'd sure like to get hold of this outfit just as she stands. There'd sure be an epidemic of stiff necks around the field for a while. Can't we requisition the damn' thing? Public emergency, act of war, danger to public morals or—I've got it, Captain! You know how they are planning to put all the fighting airdromes underground and shooting the planes out with a catapult. Well, this here object would be the perfect machine to teach the poor shavetails the action of a catapult. It's a natural."

I BEGAN to figure that perhaps I was going to lose my flivver, but then the Captain spoke up, and he was just as fair as when he decided my jitney was worth more than Jeb's fancy new car. "No, Sergeant," he says like he was figuring every word careful-like, "Mr. Willie Dunne has worked out these gadgets and he is entitled to all the credit that may accrue from them. The American Air Service don't steal things like that. Dunne, perhaps you would like to take a ride in one of our bombing planes."

That was almost more than I had been able to expect. I'd been wondering how I'd get around to that, so it wasn't long before we were in the air, and Captain Wolf was explaining to me what made the plane fly through the air instead of falling. They flew out towards Dad's farm and lime-kilns, and when I told the Captain that was where I lived, he got the pilot to dive the plane down low, and I could see Mother out in the yard, and I waved to her, and everyone laughed to see the chickens running around like a hawk

was after them. It made me feel sort of good to be up there looking down on the farm, the river and all the hills and trees, and I began to figure if I had enough money to buy the material to build a plane of my own, and then I remembered that I didn't know anything about airplanes.

When we got back to the landing-field, the Sergeant was in a fine humor, and I wondered if it was because he had got over his mad spell or because he'd had a drink, which I could smell on his breath. Anyway he took the covers off one of the motors and showed me just how it worked, and it was certainly a mighty fine piece of machinery. And all the time he was showing me things about the motor the Sergeant was talking about the Army Flying Corps and what a fine lot of people were in it and how if they got the draft law through, which they were bound to do, a man would have to go where he was ordered and that a fine mechanic might be sent to the Cavalry or maybe even to the Marines and of course after that he would never be good for anything much. He explained that if a man should enlist of his own free will before the draft and if he had some good friends working for him they might persuade the President to let him go into the Air Corps which was the highest honor in all the American army.

I'm listening pretty close even if doing a lot of fooling around with the motor and I remember what my Dad had said a few nights ago. "Son," he

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley



said, and I saw Mother frown but he went right on, "this United States of America and the State of Missouri have been pretty good to us and to our family. My great-grandfather came over from England and your mother's father and mother came from Scotland. They all built homes here and none of us have ever known what it was to go hungry or anything like that and we can talk and say what we want to and go to church where and when we please and that is what we call freedom. I just wonder if you ever thought that kind of living was worth fighting for."

COURSE I'm not a mechanic, proper-speaking. All I know about motors is what I learned from books and fooling with the trucks and tractors on Dad's farm and around the kilns where he burns lime. I figure that if I had the chance to learn more about motors, big fine motors like the ones they have in these airplanes, I might amount to something that even a girl like Annie May might be proud of. Maybe if I was a good aviation mechanic like the Sergeant I wouldn't be a hillbilly any more.

I got so interested that I guess I must have got to thinking right out loud for the first thing I knew the Captain was saying that I had the right idea and why didn't I sign up with the Air Corps and they would send me to a school where I could learn all about

motors and airplanes and as it looked as though I was a sort of natural mechanic, I would no doubt do very well indeed.

He said he would like for the army people to look over the forced-feed pump and carburetor I'd put on the flivver for he thought I had something there, a principle that might be applied to stratosphere flying. I finally promised him I'd drive the flivver car down to a place called San Antonio, which is in Texas, where he would be by the time I got there. But Captain Wolf said he would do better than that; he'd send the Sergeant to ride with me and in that way he could see how the flivver functioned out on the highway and also help me if I got into any trouble.

The Sergeant didn't seem to like that idea very much but he said orders in the army were orders so he got his bag out of the plane and we drove out to Dad's farm so I could get my things. Before we started the Sergeant looked at me kind of hard and he says: "Son, I'm not sure I've got you figured out yet, but I'm warning you, don't you ever start this machine of yours so sudden-like again. I want to live to get you in the army."

So to please the Sergeant I took it careful-like. We were driving along a sandy road between rows of blackberry bushes and wild roses when a cottontail rabbit jumped up and ran down the road and I got to thinking that a mess of rabbits would go mighty fine for supper and that I might not be able to get any eating-rabbits down

Texas way. So I got my forty-five pistol-gun from behind the seat and killed the rabbit and the Sergeant looked mighty surprised and asked me could I do that often or was it just an accident.

That Sergeant was a mighty hard man to convince so by the time we got to Dad's farm I had killed four young cottontail rabbits and three gray squirrels and the Sergeant had quit calling me Son and was addressing me as Mister.

WHEN I told Dad about joining up with the Army Air Corps he put his hand on my shoulder and said: "Willie, we're going to miss you around here, but if you and enough more like you go into the army now you'll have a place to come back to when all this foolish killing is over. I'll keep things going here; fact is, I may be able to get more work done—for you won't be around to keep the trucks and tractors torn up all the time."

Mother didn't have a thing to say, but for some reason or other she bustled around the Sergeant like he was a long-lost relative or something equally important.

Then she cooked up a fine meal of rabbit and squirrel, beaten biscuits, fine creamy mashed potatoes with hunks of fresh butter melting on top, fresh vegetables from her garden and she had opened some of her finest jars of preserves and put a dish of comb honey on the table.

"That tastes like honey!" said the Sergeant as he speared a piece of the comb.

"It is honey, silly," said Mother with a laugh, and when the Sergeant finally pushed back his chair and said he just had to come up for air, Mother went over to the sideboard and drew a small glass of corn liquor that had been old when the Civil War was fought and gave one to each of us. Dad said quietly, "To the Army, and the Navy and our country."

The Sergeant tossed off his drink; then a startled look came over his face and he smacked his lips, but Mother didn't take the hint. Instead she took him out into the orchard where the beehives were and explained to him that bees really did make their honey in combs and not in jars, the way he said he'd always seen it in the stores in Brooklyn.

We sat up late for the radio war-news bulletin and listened to the Sergeant explain some of the technical details of the aerial fighting. When I took him to the spare-room, he sat down on the feather bed and it sank down so far he thought he was falling. "Hell's tokens!" he gasped. "After twenty years on an army bunk I'll never be able to sleep on anything as soft as that."

But he didn't have any trouble sleeping and the next morning I had to knock on his door twice and he didn't really wake up until he got under the needle shower. The Ozark spring water that Dad had piped into the house was cold enough to put life into a dead man. The Sergeant said he never ate much breakfast but Mother kidded him along and he didn't seem to have much trouble putting away a stack of buckwheat cakes covered with honey, several eggs and rashers of home-cured bacon. Mother had laid out my new suit so when we finally pulled out everything looked highly respectable but the Lizzie.

IT took us three days to drive to San Antonio where the Air School was. We could have done it quicker but before we left the Sergeant had bought two boxes of forty-five shells for my revolver-gun and some for his own forty-five automatic pistol-gun that was supplied to him by the army. Every time he saw a rabbit he made me shoot it and he put a mark down in a little black book he carried in his pocket. Mother had packed enough food into a box to last us a week and that held us up a bit for the Sergeant said we sure didn't want to take any of that food into an army mess, they were trying to build up the army, not demoralize it.

I tried his automatic pistol-gun, and pretty soon I got the hang of it and was doing very well. We were shooting at a mark when two State policemen came along on their motorcycles and were going to arrest us but the Sergeant explained things so they watched us for awhile and then they shot a few times with their short revolver-guns and asked me a lot of questions about shooting. All I could tell them was that I had been shooting revolver-guns all my life and that in fact I did all my hunting with them, and I guessed that was why I could shoot so well.

The Sergeant asked the policemen if they would time the Lizzie to see how fast it would go and they laughed and said they would try to keep up with us but if they didn't for us to stop in the next town and wait for them and they'd buy the drinks.

The Sergeant grinned, and when we came to a straight stretch of highway he waved at the policemen and says to me: "Let her go, Dunne, for the honor of the Air Service." The Sergeant braced himself and ducked his head down between his shoulders and I fed the gas and we lit out lickety-split and way behind us, getting fainter all the time, we could hear the sirens of the motorcycles and pretty soon the Lizzie is doing seventy-five and I was glad I had the back end loaded down with sandbags. Anyway it was time to slow down before the flivver thought it was

an airplane. The Sergeant heaved a big sigh of relief and says: "Boy, what a way to learn to fly!"

When the policemen caught up with us they were very respectful-like and said they had clocked us at seventy-seven miles an hour and how in the name of the law did we ever do it anyway. The Sergeant laughed at them and said it was just the way they done it in the Air Service, they done everything fast.

Down in San Antonio they turned me over to some doctors who pounded me around awhile and made me say "ah" and they measured me and made me run around the room on my tiptoes and a lot of other things I didn't know you had to be able to do to work on motors. Then a soldier with two stripes on his sleeve, a corporal they called him, took me to another building where they outfitted me with uniforms, blankets and guns and a lot of doo-dads and I wondered how a soldier was ever going to be able to fight and carry all that stuff around.

After they got me straightened out with a place to sleep and showed me where to eat they sent me out with a lot more soldiers to learn to drill and to shoot rifle-guns. We were out on the rifle-range shooting, when I saw the Sergeant who had driven down with me in the flivver. He had a lot of money-bills in his hand and people seemed to be giving him more. Then a Lieutenant came over to me and I saluted him as I had been taught to salute an officer and when he had saluted me as the regulations called for him to do, he says that he has heard rumors that I thought I could shoot some with the automatic pistol-gun and he would like to shoot a few times with me as he is an expert and perhaps he could give me some valuable pointers on the finer aspects of shooting.

So the Lieutenant shot a few times to show me how it should be done and he did very well indeed only I thought it was too close for such a big target and I told him so and he looked at me and said I was crazy as twenty-five yards was standard range. The Sergeant snickered and the Lieutenant officer gave him a very dirty look and they put the target out to a hundred-yard mark, and at that distance I didn't miss the bull's-eye once but the Lieutenant got kind of rattled and didn't do so well. Then they moved the target out another fifty yards and the Lieutenant said it wasn't regulation and he refused to shoot but I did and I got all my bullets into the bull's-eye only they were not so close together as I wanted them and I said as much to the Lieutenant Officer and that I thought I could do better as soon as I got used to the automatic pistol-gun they had given me. He just looked kinda blank and walked away and didn't say a word.

Then the Sergeant comes over and he hands me a hundred dollars in money-bills and said that was my share for beating the officer at shooting and he says it's like taking money from a baby for the officer is some kind of a champion pistol-gun shooter and is always ready to bet his money against anyone, and almost always he wins.

They had a very fine school where they taught everything about motors and I worked very hard and pretty soon they transferred me to the motor repair-shop, but it was not the fun I had thought it was going to be for the motors were all new and shiny and there was no chance to experiment on them as I had done on Dad's farm with the trucks and tractors and you always had to do things the same way and every time I tried something different they said it was not regulation.

But most every day I was out on the pistol-gun range, shooting at targets, and I liked that very much and I had all the ammunition I wanted to shoot and did not have to pay for any of it. One day they had some kind of a shooting-match and they asked me to go into it and it was a lot easier than the turkey-shoots we have back home in the Ozarks at Thanksgiving time and Christmas. I won it and then they told me I had defeated the champion pistol-gun shooter of the army and they pinned a medal on my tunic, which is what they call a coat back in the Ozarks of Missouri, and they said they were going to promote me to Corporal, which is a grade where you have to be smarter than a Sergeant but you don't get as much pay.

ONE day the officer in charge of engineering sent for me and told me they had been experimenting with my forced-feed pump and carburetor and they were willing to pay me five thousand dollars for them and there would be more coming later as they got things perfected and they might want me to do some more research work along that line.

I sent the five thousand dollars home to Dad and told him to buy some new trucks, for that way he could enlarge his lime-burning business and make more money. He wrote back and said he was surprised at the way I was getting along in the army and he would use the money to make a fine business of the farm as anyway some day it would be my farm, especially now that I was in the army learning to protect it. He said Annie May says she knew I would do things if I ever got away from the Ozarks where I'd never be anything but a hill-billy.

And that sounds kinda foolish to me for she knew I had made all those things before I ever left the farm.

Airplanes were flying around all the time, some of them dropping bombs and others shooting at targets with machine-guns. I hung around the armory until the Armorer Sergeant said he had taught me everything he knew about machine-guns and bombs and it was a lot more fun than working on motors where everything was the same all the time.

I'd been a Corporal quite a spell when the Sergeant who had come down from home with me in the flivver says to me, sort of strained-like: "Corporal Willie Dunne, I'm a man of my word. Back there in Springfield quite a while ago I made a promise to myself. I said that if I ever got you in the army that some day I was going to knock your damned head off. Now I'm going to keep that promise."

NOW all this time I had thought the Sergeant was my best friend; I tell him so—but he just laughs and says that is right but nevertheless and notwithstanding he's got a chore to do and he's going to do it, so help him, and if he couldn't do it alone he'd call out the Marines which would sure disgrace the Air Service no end.

When I was in high school back in Missouri I thought I was a good boxer and I was younger than the Sergeant by a lot of years, maybe twenty-five, and I knew I could lick him but I didn't want to do it. But he insisted.

That night we put on the gloves at the recreation hall. It was all regular, ring, referee, everything, and I said again to the Sergeant: "I don't like to fight you for you're an old man and I don't want to hurt you." But he just laughs and says that after all he guesses it will be a pleasure and he hits me on the nose and that makes me mad and I wade in and he hits me in the eye and then on the nose again and the blood spurts and everyone cheers and the Sergeant hits me in the other eye and then on the chin and I go down.

I got up and I'll admit that I am kind of groggy and am also surprised, for this Sergeant is a great fighter. When we come out for the second round he hits me on the chin and says: "That's for trying to snap my head off." And he got me so dizzy wondering what he meant that he hit me real hard and as I lay there on the canvas dreaming I realized that even if I am younger than the Sergeant that maybe there are a few things in this army that I do not know and that box-fighting is one of them and that if I am ever going to make a first-class soldier capable of fighting to defend our country the way Dad would want me to defend it I had better get busy and study and practice a lot of things. Then the Sergeant comes over and he helps me to my feet and as they take off my gloves I say to him: "O.K., Sergeant, we'll try it out again a week from to-



"Son," Dad says, "this United States of America has been pretty good to us."

night, and maybe again two weeks from now."

The Sergeant laughed, which was more than I could do for my lips were all cut and said he really did have hopes for me now and he'd be glad to accommodate me any time but he really didn't enjoy fighting amateurs so I'd best get some experience.

And then I found out one of the most peculiar things about the army. The soldiers who liked you best were the first ones to cheer when you got beat up. They all liked the Sergeant even if he was all the time playing jokes and getting the best of them like in poker games and with the dice, but they all wanted to see some one lick him. Plenty of soldiers volunteered to train me how to fight with my fists and so all my spare time I spent boxing with them.

One day the Sergeant comes over to where I am boxing and he says he is

going to get me promoted to be a master Sergeant for it will never do for a mere Corporal to be fighting with and maybe whip a Sergeant. He goes on to say that he has promised my mother he would do his very best to make a good soldier of me and as he was figuring on going back to the Ozarks with me next month when leave was due he wanted to be able to tell my folks that I was the kind of soldier to be proud of. Of course they always knew I was a natural shot with the pistol-guns but he wanted to tell them that I'd whipped the best man in the entire United States Air Service, which means all the army and the Marine Corps as well, and he is that guy which is the best fighter.

So I guess I've got a mighty hard time coming to me for the next month or so but that is the way things go here and they are even going to give me leave so I can go back home to the Ozarks and tinker for a while with the motors of Dad's trucks and tractors and I'll give Annie May that Airedale pup that I forgo to give her when I joined the army.

No News



"A car—jus' a car," said the boy. But he added that there were two sevens on the license number.

INNIS BARR maintained gloomy immobility when Deacon Simms stuck his head into the cubby-hole. News was dead in Colusa, and Innis Barr was chief mourner.

"Boss, your buddy Sam Robbins just fired a shot right across Flagler Boulevard at Herb Ackroyd," Deacon said. "Then he lit out. Nice going, for a deputy sheriff!"

Innis Barr put his feet on the floor with a crash. This was more than news; this was personal trouble. Deputy Sheriff Sam Robbins was a friend, not a mere guinea pig to whom dread things must happen to supply news for the Colusa County *Item*, Florida's Liveliest Weekly.

"Right across Flagler Boulevard!" Deacon Simms repeated. For a composing-room foreman, he was easily scandalized. "And then ran! Why

didn't he stay an' let on he was just arrestin' Ackroyd for gamblin' or something? Now he's headed for stir himself. The Sheriff's been wantin' to get him."

If it had been a news story, Innis Barr would have been out on it now. It was the personal element that made him shove the wrong arm into his coat-sleeve.

"Sam was in here not half an hour ago," said Innis Barr. He started for the front door, stopped and headed back into the composing-room. Sam Robbins often came in by the alley behind the one-story *Item* building. And he'd know Innis Barr was his best bet for hide-out or confession.

Deacon Simms followed his editor through the idle composing-room.

"I guess we go to press tomorrow, then?" he asked. "Is Desperation Day

over? You figger this'll give us enough stuff to put out an honest nickel's worth of newspaper?"

Innis Barr didn't answer that. He was looking into the dark spaces of the composing-room and behind the linotype. Sam Robbins wasn't there.

"Well, how about it?" Deacon Simms said sharply.

Innis Barr looked up and down the alley and then turned back to his hostile foreman. Once before Innis Barr, who had worked in New York and was accustomed to plenty of news breaking, had become so disgusted with Colusa that he had threatened to suspend publication of the *Item* for a week. And today, the day before publication, which was the weekly Desperation Day, he had renewed that threat on two grounds: (1) A town and county so devoid of happenings

Is Bad News

A newspaper man's friend tries to manufacture news on a dull day—and succeeds too well.

by RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS



Ben Dunn had reason to be grim. Sam Robbins was not only his deputy but his brother-in-law, a fact deplored by both.

"I'm right there, in that shoe-shinin' chair, waitin' for the boy," said Herb Ackroyd. Though he was a fat round target for any man's gun, his free gesticulation showed that he was unhurt. "This shot roars out, and the bullet hits above my head."

He pointed to a sizable nick in the concrete block of the barber-shop building ten feet above the sidewalk. Innis barely glanced at it. He was looking at Ackroyd's feet.

"I jump down out o' the chair, and I see Sam Robbins lookin' out at me from between two cars over in the parkin' lot. He still has his rod in his hand. I start yelling, and he fades into the side door of that empty store. Skippy Gross saw him from the bingo parlor."

"That's right," said Skippy Gross, who patrolled the aisles and handled boards during the bingo sessions.

BARR was not impressed by this testimony. But a man in the crowd, Seth Colwell, a farmer with several hundred acres of beans under cultivation, spoke up:

"That's so, Sheriff. I was flat on the flo'boa'ds in my car in the parking-lot, trying my damndest to get a new bulb in the socket behind the instrument-boa'd. I straightened up to get a breath an' cuss a little, and I saw Sam Robbins sneaking into place between two cars."

"Didn't he see you?" Dunn asked.

"No. He lifted his gun, took good aim and let go before I could yell. He started travelin' like a roadrunner, the minute he heard me shout."

"Did you chase him?" Innis Barr asked. He resented this testimony, because it sounded sort of true.

"Not me," said Colwell. "I know Sam. I figured sho' he must ha' gone crazy to do that. And he still had his gun."

Sheriff Dunn grunted. He turned to Ackroyd.

"Got any idea why Sam Robbins shot at you?"

"I have, an' I'll say so here an' now," Ackroyd said loudly. "Ten minutes before that, I was in my bingo parlor, fixin' it up for the season. Robbins stops at the door. I come out. We talk about crime, news an' stuff, and then he works around to it."

"To what?" asked Sheriff Dunn.

"To the shake-down," said Ackroyd.

"What?" said Dunn sharply.

Innis Barr listened intently. This certainly wasn't true.

"Me, I been a citizen o' this town for two years," Herb Ackroyd said. "I'm no Miami big-shot. I run my business straight an' clean. I never paid no protection—I never got asked. Bingo, the way I run it, is a game o' skill an'— Anyhow, Sam Robbins wants a cut, see?"

"That's a lie!" said Ben Dunn. He spoke hotly, without thought of public reaction. "Sam's a no-account, easy-goin', lazy pain-in-the-neck as a dep'ty, but he's no crook. You're lyin', Ackroyd!"

"Could be, but I saw Sam shoot," said Seth Colwell.

"What were you doing in the chair?" Innis Barr asked Ackroyd suddenly.

"Waiting for a shine." Then Ackroyd's eyes were drawn to his feet, impeccably shod in recently polished tan-and-white saddle shoes. "Waiting for the boy. I wanted to send him on an errand."

Ben Dunn rubbed his jaw, staring at Ackroyd. He waited for Innis Barr to speak, but Innis was through.

"You aim to arrest Sam, Ben?" asked somebody with a taste for drama.

"I'm goin' to arrest him," said Ben Dunn. He started toward the courthouse to get out his deputies.

Innis Barr broke away. He didn't know what to make of it. When Sam Robbins had left Innis sulking in his cubbyhole no more than an hour ago, he had seemed normal enough. . . .

Innis Barr got out his dusty car and drove over the inland waterway to the narrow barrier beach. Half a mile up the line he left his car and plunged into a tangle of palmetto scrub.

The vaguely marked path led him to the edge of the waterway. There, among the young mangroves that stood

did not deserve to have a newspaper.

(2) It was dishonest to get out a newsless paper and charge a nickel for it.

But now Sam Robbins needed the item for his defense.

"Yes," said Innis Barr. "We go to press. Start setting up that guff on my desk, and the correspondence. I'll be back."

He shot out the front door. No need to ask where Herb Ackroyd had been; he was always in his bingo parlor or in the barber-shop next door.

Herb Ackroyd stood in front of the bingo parlor. Sheriff Ben Dunn, as dour as an Old Testament prophet and almost as furrowed of brow, was looking at him. The two men were the center of an animated group of Colusa residents; Colusa began perking up in December after the summer heat and the fall rains.

with their roots in the salt water, he found Sam Robbins sitting on a log. Sam's apologetic grin further creased the brown skin of his sun-dried face. He was a thin young man, but not lean from great activity. He just came that way. Although when discovered in this restful nook he would allege that he was fishin' as usual, he had no line out.

"I thought you'd be pokin' round-about," Sam said. Beyond a certain embarrassment he seemed as usual.

"Spit it out," said Innis.

"Don't know's I hadn't better," Sam said. "I sho' am in a mess. Looks like I'd ought to slide home to Geo'gia."

"Come on!" said Innis. "The chain-gang's where you'll land, any minute. Ben's getting out a posse."

"Well, suh, after I left the *Item*, Innis, I went along sort of studyin'. Seemed like Colusa ought to be newsy enough to support a weekly paper. Me, I like it right peaceful, but I know how you—how you have to be."

INNIS thinned his lips in anticipation. A friend's difficulty was a difficulty for Sam.

"I figgered about Harry Blaine running away with that thousand-dollar pay-roll for the bean-pickers last month," said Sam. "That seemed sort of worn out."

"Hadh't I warned it over three times?" asked Innis Barr bitterly. "Blaine's probably spent every nickel somewhere up North. That story's as stale as Cain killing Abel."

"Sho' is," said Sam politely. "Then that colored boy fallin' out o' the cocopalms—no suh, not even by calling it human interest could you get white folks to read that again. So I come to this Frank Wagner o' Miami running off the West Dixie highway into a cypress tree."

"Two weeks and three days ago," Innis said.

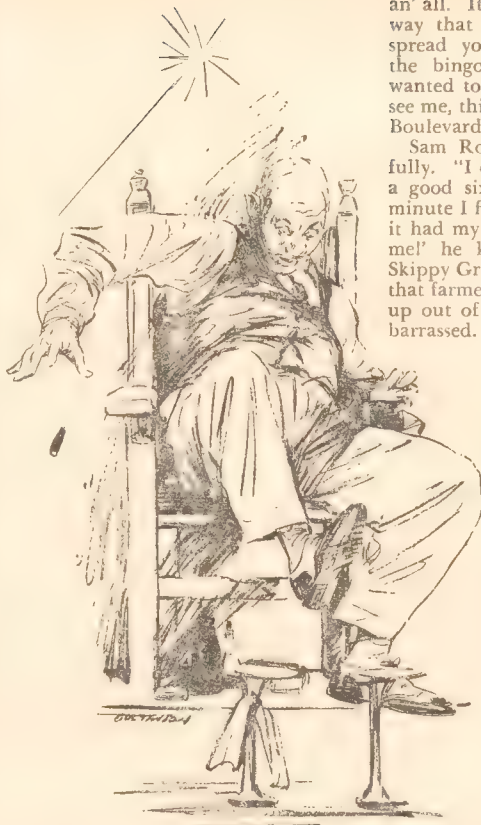
"But he's still in our hospital, and he might ha' taken a turn for the worse," said Sam.

"He's getting along fine," said Innis. "Would I pass up that chance?"

"And then I remembered hearin' a couple o' bean-pickers talking about it two-three days ago—about how an ol' car shootin' out of a side road had made this Wagner man lose control o' his sedan—he bein' moving about seventy," said Sam.

"See last week's *Item*."

"But this one bean-picker talked about another bean-picker, one of a pack of Geo'gia pickers squatin' by the old Alderman farmhouse," said Sam. "A bean-pickin' kid saw this ol' car come off the West Dixie. The kid figgered the white man had come to throw 'em out o' the cabin. But the car turned around quick, near stickin' in the sand, and then went whanging out into the West Dixie again right in



an' all. It would be a big mystery, the way that crook told it. You could spread yo'self, an' it wouldn't hurt the bingo parlor. Seemed like he wanted to be shot at. Nobody could see me, things bein' sleepy even on the Boulevard."

Sam Robbins shook his head ruefully. "I obliged," he said. "I aimed a good six feet oveh him. But the minute I fired, he let out a whoop, an' it had my name to it. 'Robbins shot me!' he kep' callin'. An' his boy, Skippy Gross, he called the same. An' that farmer, Colwell, he stuck his head up out of his car. I was plumb embarrassed. And I vamoosed."

"I aimed a good six feet oveh him. But the minute I fired, he let out a whoop. 'Robbins shot me!' he kep' callin'."

the path o' Wagner's car—which was why Wagner upset, missin' it."

"Most of that's in last week's *Item* too," said Innis.

"But you never ran down an eyewitness," said Sam. "Wouldn't it be news if even a darky boy saw what you called the criminally careless car in that editorial?"

"It's not a nickel's worth of news."

"I thought I'd go moseying down to Alderman's," said Sam. "And while I was figgering, I came to Herb Ackroyd's bingo place. And he havin' lived in Miami some, I stopped to ask him if he knew Wagner. He didn't."

"Now you're getting to it," said Innis. "But why shoot a cheap little gambler like Herb Ackroyd?"

"He didn't see any news left in Wagner's accident when I told him I was going down to where it happened. But he said to me: 'Look heah! If you want to he'p out Innis Barr, I'll he'p too, right now. We'll rig up a sensation for him.'"

"What!" said Innis.

Sam Robbins nodded. "We got to studyin'. I swear, Innis, it was his notion that it would cause a right powerful commotion if somebody shot at him, him being romantic—a gambler

Innis Barr poked Sam fiercely in the ribs. "I might have known it was some quixotic stunt like that, you old grave-robbin'," he said; "and I appreciate it. But, Sam, you're in a mess of trouble."

"A right pretty double-cross, that Ackroyd done me," said Sam. "Started yellin' out my name like I meant to kill him."

"That—" Innis abandoned the quest for a perfect name for Herb Ackroyd. He scowled. "It gets screwier every minute. You or the Sheriff ever of-fend Ackroyd?"

The mild deputy shook his head.

"It's bigger than that," Innis Barr said. "Ackroyd wouldn't pull that trick without a powerful reason. But what is it?"

"I sho' would like to know," Sam Robbins said. Sorrowfully he touched his deputy's shield, pinned under his coat. "Maybe I better start travelin' while my feet are free."

"No!" said Innis. "That must be what Ackroyd wants—to get you discredited, or to get you out of here. It must be that! He knows Ben Dunn can't shield you—and wouldn't. Why?"

That piercing question made Sam stroke his head as if to coax an idea out of it. "Why?" he repeated.

"You know something—or maybe you're going to do something—that will mean danger to him," said Innis, grimly certain. "That's got to be it. Some danger to Ackroyd—from what you know or what you were going to do. And he had to stop you dead—on the spur of the moment. He had to change your plans—fast."

"I'm plumb flattered that my plans are that impo'tant," said Sam. "But honest, all I was figgerin' on doin' was a little proddin' on the Wagner accident down on the Alderman farm."

"And that's what you're going to do now—if you're game to take a chance on Ben Dunn picking you up around here."

"Why, sho'," said Sam. "Might be a story—might be interesting."

"Come on," said Innis. He led the way to his old sedan and opened the door to the rear compartment for Sam.

"You ride in back, and duck when we come near anybody," he said. "I'll cross the Federal and run south on a back road."

A minute later Innis cried: "Duck!"

Two of Ben Dunn's deputies in a fast car were riding north on the Federal. The driver braked hard at the sight of Innis' car. Innis waved casually. He crossed the Federal behind their screaming car and kept moving. He didn't breathe until, after a moment of indecision, the deputy at the wheel kicked the throttle again. The car shot on to northward.

"Ben means business," Innis said.

"Cain't blame him," Sam said.

Until they got out to the edge of the 'Glades, where cleared fields, planted in beans, alternated with scrubby woods, Sam busied himself with frequently diving down out of sight.

Except where there was picking, the bean-fields were empty. Sam Robbins settled himself more easily on the seat.

"Right theah's the first an' last field Harry Blaine paid off for Colusa Farms the day he ran off with the payroll," said Sam.

Innis Barr grunted. He was wrestling with problems more urgent than that of Blaine. Why did Herb Ackroyd want to stop Sam Robbins from visiting the scene of Frank Wagner's collision with a cypress tree?

THEY ran alongside one of the drainage canals that sometimes prevented crops on this fertile lowland from being flooded.

"Maybe Blaine was the man that drove into Wagner's way!" Sam Robbins said. "No, Wagner's crack didn't come till three days after Blaine had run. 'Twon't do."

Innis was slowing for the turn into the crossroad that connected the Alderman place with the West Dixie. Though the fields here were still worked, the old Alderman house had been a stubby, fire-blackened ruin for

ten years. Only a single shack had survived the fire.

"Better duck," said Innis. "Those bean-pickers are still using that old cabin. No, look—they're clearing out. They're loading a truck."

Sam Robbins sat up. "If they're movin' on, I'm safe enough," he said. "Maybe they're goin' to Dania to pick tomatoes."

There was consternation among the Georgia negroes, a round dozen of assorted sizes and sexes, when the car stopped beside their incredibly debilitated truck. They were relieved when they heard Innis' questions, and pushed out a nine-year-old boy who had seen the car responsible for Wagner's accident. He told the same story of the car's approach to the cabin and swift retreat onto the West Dixie. "A car—jus' a car; an' a white man—jus' a white man," said the boy.

But he added that there were two sevens on the license number. How'd he know? Jus' he was collectin' sevens that day. He got two off the car. It had no license-plate in front, only behind, but he got two sevens off that.

Next instant his hand came out, an automatic gripped in his fingers. "Don't try—" he started.



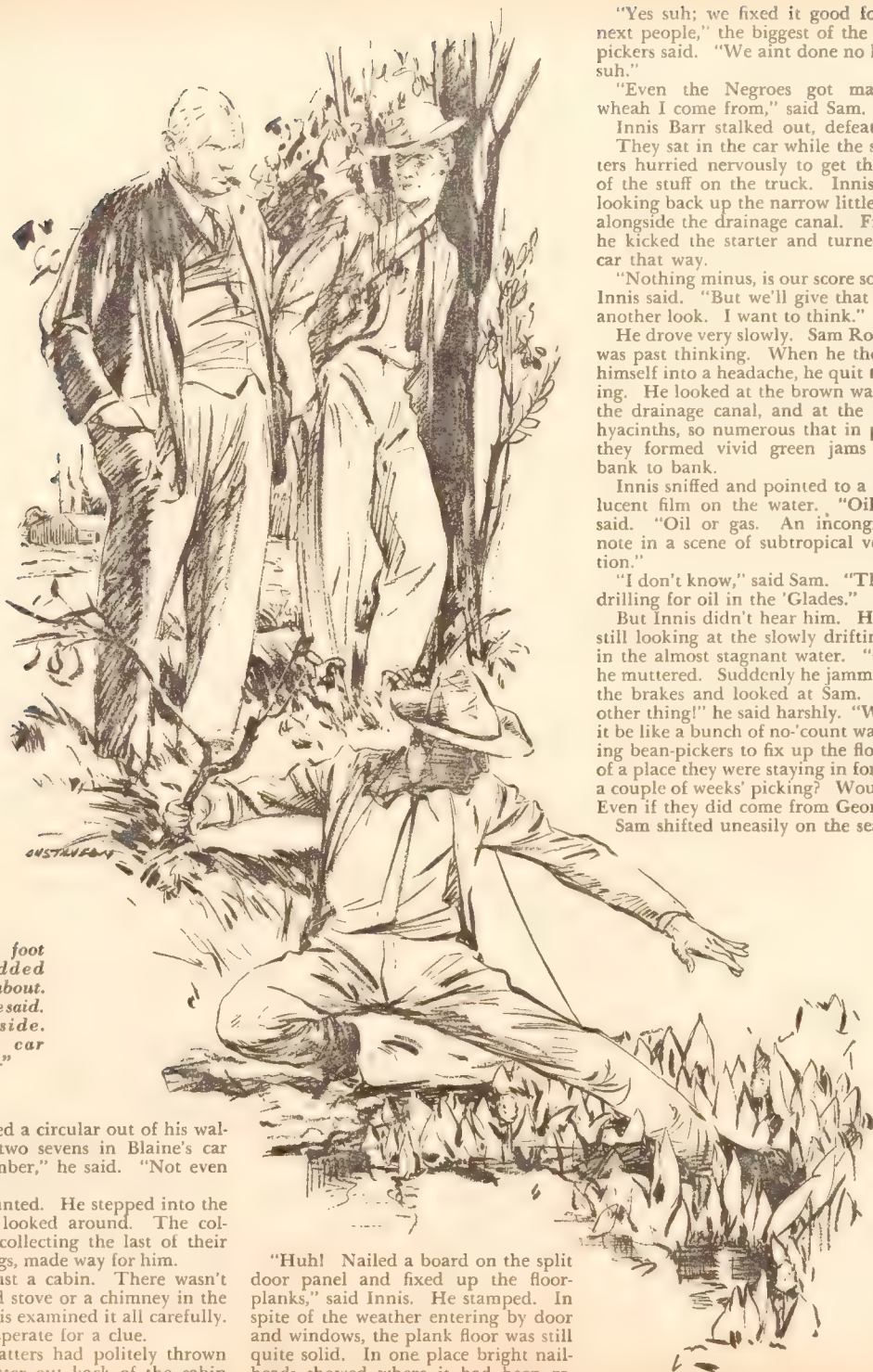
All Innis could get was that it was a Florida car, since it had only one license plate; old and dark in color, since it hadn't impressed the boy.

Innis circulated, asking questions. Sam Robbins sat on the running-board, waiting for Innis to finish his unprofitable inquiries.

"The car wreck happened the day after they got here," Innis reported to him. "Ten of 'em pick. The old man is paralyzed, and he stayed here in the cabin with the baby all the time. Mean anything to you?"

Sam Robbins was slow to answer. He found that Innis' eyes had strayed up the side road by the drainage canal, the road that led south from the field where Harry Blaine had last been seen.

Innis shook his head in sudden decision. "It doesn't make sense that the white man was Harry Blaine sneaking around here three days after his get-away. Even if this cabin had been empty, it was still too near where you and Ben Dunn and the other deputies were searching."



With one foot Sam prodded gingerly about. "A car!" he said. "On its side. What's a car doin'—"

Sam fished a circular out of his wallet. "No two sevens in Blaine's car license number," he said. "Not even one."

Innis grunted. He stepped into the cabin and looked around. The colored folk, collecting the last of their scanty things, made way for him.

It was just a cabin. There wasn't even an old stove or a chimney in the place. Innis examined it all carefully. He was desperate for a clue.

The squatters had politely thrown all their litter out back of the cabin and were leaving the place fairly clean.

"Huh! Nailed a board on the split door panel and fixed up the floor-planks," said Innis. He stamped. In spite of the weather entering by door and windows, the plank floor was still quite solid. In one place bright nail-heads showed where it had been re-nailed.

"Yes suh; we fixed it good for the next people," the biggest of the bean-pickers said. "We aint done no harm, suh."

"Even the Negroes got manners wheah I come from," said Sam.

Innis Barr stalked out, defeated.

They sat in the car while the squatters hurried nervously to get the last of the stuff on the truck. Innis kept looking back up the narrow little road alongside the drainage canal. Finally he kicked the starter and turned the car that way.

"Nothing minus, is our score so far," Innis said. "But we'll give that place another look. I want to think."

He drove very slowly. Sam Robbins was past thinking. When he thought himself into a headache, he quit thinking. He looked at the brown water of the drainage canal, and at the water hyacinths, so numerous that in places they formed vivid green jams from bank to bank.

Innis sniffed and pointed to a translucent film on the water. "Oil," he said. "Oil or gas. An incongruous note in a scene of subtropical vegetation."

"I don't know," said Sam. "They're drilling for oil in the 'Glades.'"

But Innis didn't hear him. He was still looking at the slowly drifting oil in the almost stagnant water. "Gas!" he muttered. Suddenly he jammed on the brakes and looked at Sam. "Another thing!" he said harshly. "Would it be like a bunch of no-count wandering bean-pickers to fix up the flooring of a place they were staying in for only a couple of weeks' picking? Would it? Even if they did come from Georgia?"

Sam shifted uneasily on the seat.

"Well, no," he said. "They might make a door airtight—they aint fond o' night air—but they'd just figger on fixin' a loose floor-plank."

"That's better," said Innis. "Somebody else fixed that floor. We'll be going back in a minute."

He started the car and ran on alongside the canal. "No more oil film," he said to Sam. Ahead they saw the point where canal and road diverged. Innis slowed. He nodded ahead.

"You better duck. Car coming."

Sam Robbins ducked. There wasn't as much room in the front beside the emergency brake. Of a sudden he saw Innis' feet jump for clutch and foot-brake, and the car swerved. The brakes of another car squealed. Somebody shouted angrily.

"Hold it!" said Innis. "I want to talk to you." To Sam he said: "Get set to be hanged for a sheep. Here's Herb Ackroyd himself. Up and out!"

SAM ROBBINS straightened up. He piled out. Herb Ackroyd, in the blocked car, stared; his round face got hard.

"Know what you're doing—hiding that guy?" he asked Innis. "The Sheriff's after him."

Innis walked around the back of Ackroyd's car and up the other side. "Two sevens," he said with a gesture toward the license-plate. "I'm collecting them too. Stand by."

"Now listen!" said Ackroyd. "I come down here thinkin' Robbins might be here. You bring him back, an' I'll give him a break. See what I mean? You take him back to the Sheriff."

Innis jerked open the door and gestured to Ackroyd to get out. Then his eyes swept beyond the bingo artist to the floor of the car.

"What's the wrecking-bar for?" he asked.

Ackroyd scowled. "I been usin' it, fixin' up my place," he said. "What about it?"

"Get out!" said Innis. He meant it, and Sam Robbins came closer to back him up.

"Not even an editor can get away—" Ackroyd began.

"Two men can make you get out," said Innis. "Want to see?"

"Nobody's caught up with me yet to tell me I'm not a dep'ty sheriff," Sam said mildly. "I'd get out."

Ackroyd got out. "Maybe you know what you're doin', brother, but you're goin' to wish you didn't," he said to Innis.

"Been down this way lately?" Innis asked.

"I stick to town—an' my business," said Ackroyd. "I'm no bean-country explorer. I aint been down here in a year."

"Two sevens and a wrecking-bar," said Innis. "Sam, push Ackroyd's car

over to the side of the road. Then turn mine around. You drive. I'm going to show Ackroyd something."

"Sho' thing," said Sam, as if he knew what this was about.

Innis and Ackroyd waited. The chunky gambler worked his lips. His eyes were wary.

Sam turned Innis Barr's car around.

Stealing a deputy's badge and gun is no way to make a quiet getaway without too much pursuit. Sam Robbins was real put out about it, and Innis Barr had to do some right heavy thinking. . . . In an early issue.

Innis shepherded Ackroyd into the rear seat of the car. Sam drove. Innis sat beside Sam, but facing Ackroyd.

"Slow!" said Innis. "Dead slow. And drive close to the canal, Sam."

"Slow an' close," said Sam. He started the car crawling. Innis fixed his eyes on Herb Ackroyd. He didn't say anything. But he watched Herb Ackroyd's eyes with all the intensity he could summon up.

"What is this?" Herb Ackroyd asked. His face was impassive; his lips hardly moved to ask the question.

"Svengali," said Innis.

Ackroyd looked ahead, past Innis' eyes, at the road. His eyes fixed themselves on that straight and narrow highway with a concentration that was extreme. Innis said no more; he stared at Herb Ackroyd's eyes. Not his face; but just his eyes. The car crept on. Innis kept peering at the pupils of Ackroyd's eyes, studying the slightest flicker.

It was impossible for any man to maintain forever that rigid fixity upon the road. Ackroyd seemed to realize this, but not before sweat poured down his face.

He looked to the left, at the scrubby woods. "You're nuts," he said to Innis. "You an' him both."

"Hold it, Sam," said Innis. "We passed a big jam of hyacinths on the canal fifty feet or so before Ackroyd decided I was nuts. Let's go back there."

Sam backed the car. Ackroyd had clamped his lips shut. They ran back to where the water hyacinths, freely floating as wind and current directed, had formed a living dam. They got out, Ackroyd on invitation, and stood looking down on that jam of water plants.

"Seems as if the hyacinths had hung up on something not far below the surface," Innis said. He tapped Sam Robbins impressively on the shoulder.

"And you're my witness that it wasn't until we'd passed this spot during my staring act that Ackroyd relaxed and called us nuts."

"That's so," said Sam. "That sho' is so."

"Before that time he was too busy keeping his eyes off the canal to think of anything else," Innis said. "But right after we pass the spot where the oil film begins to show on the water, he gets insulting and confident again."

Innis opened up the baggage-compartment of his car and selected a light line and a three-ounce sinker from his fishing equipment. He attached the sinker and swung it out into the hyacinth tangle.

The line went slack almost as the sinker touched the water plants.

"Something solid right under the surface there," Innis said. "Maybe it's an oil derrick. That's right where the oil first shows on the surface."

Sam massaged his head. Innis was pulling on the line, but the sinker was caught under water, close to the bank.

Sam scrambled down the side and with one foot prodded gingerly about under the tangle of hyacinths.

"A car!" he said. "On its side. I'm touchin' a wheel. A car? What's a car doin'—"

He felt about more wholeheartedly. He looked up at Innis, who was standing very close to Herb Ackroyd.

"If I could just get at the license plate!" Sam said, and felt about some more. He knelt on the submerged car and thrust his arm deep under water. "I'm touching it," he reported. "Pro'bly rusted on."

"Try reading the numbers with your fingers," Innis said.

Sam fumbled, frowned and groped. "Six—yes suh! Six-eight, is how it starts."

"That's how Harry Blaine's number starts," said Innis.

"I'll bet it's Harry Blaine's car," said Herb Ackroyd in a queer sort of voice.

"Gamblers bet on sure things," said Innis.

"No cracks!" said Ackroyd. "How would I know—"

OF a sudden Sam Robbins scrambled quickly halfway up the bank. He lifted a whitish face to Innis.

"Through a window I touched a boot," he said. "There was somethin' in it."

He stared down. "Harry Blaine had high leather boots on when he disappeared," he said. "I figure we've been doin' Harry wrong, sayin' he run off with that bean-pickin' money."

"Know anything about this?" Innis asked Ackroyd.

"Not a thing," said Ackroyd. "How would I?"

Innis shrugged.

"I would be a dep'ty," said Sam bitterly. With reluctance he groped in the water again. Then he straightened up. "There's a creeper—a strong creeper—bound around that boot, ty-

ing it to—the other. Looks like the—
the body was bound down in the car.”

Innis nodded. “I didn’t figure this was an accident,” he said. “I suppose the idea was that the water in the canal wouldn’t get low enough to show the car till the dry winter was about over. By that time the creeper would have rotted away, other clues would be destroyed, and nobody would expect to find any money left in the wreck. It would seem just an unfortunate swerve off the road.”

“You guys better quit thinkin’ you can pin this on me,” said Ackroyd. “You aint got a prayer.”

Innis nodded at the brown water. “This will keep till we run down to the cabin on the Alderman place and give it a real going-over,” he said.

“For what?” asked Sam. Ackroyd’s eyes were deep set.

“For what must have been hidden there by the man who killed Harry Blaine,” said Innis. “Why else should he be so scary about being seen near the cabin? A man with no guilty secrets would have ordered those bean-pickers out, not run away so fast he caused a car-crash on the West Dixie.”

“That’s so,” said Sam. “He was crazy—’fraid o’ being seen by those pickers.”

Innis looked at Herb Ackroyd. “Why else would the man frame up a cockeyed stunt like getting himself shot at to prevent you, Sam, from prowling round the Alderman place? That was desperation. I’m thinking the cabin’s got sure dynamite in it for the killer.”

Herb Ackroyd wrenched at his collar. “Listen!” he said. “You got this wrong, boys. You got this whole thing framed up wrong.”

Innis kept his face smooth in spite of surprise at this.

ACKROYD jerked a finger toward the canal. “It was no murder,” he said. “It was just a case of finding’s keepings. That’s all.”

Sam’s eyes were wide. There was no reason yet for Ackroyd to crack. “I’m still a dep’ty,” he said reluctantly. “I got to warn you not to spill anything that’ll tend to land you on the griddle.”

“Don’t be stupid!” Ackroyd snarled. “I didn’t kill him!”

“I’m driving along by the canal,” he said to Innis. “I come to this place and see the rear end of Harry Blaine’s car stickin’ up out of the water in the canal. Maybe a tire blew. I go down and pull him out. He’s dead—and he’s got the pay-roll money stuck careless in his coat pocket.”

He threw up his hands. “He’s dead,” he said. “An’ if I hadn’t come along within an hour, that money would ha’ gone driftin’ down the canal with the hyacinths. I found it an’ saved it.”

He nodded his round head, with his eyes on Innis. Sam’s jaw still sagged at this unnecessary confession. Ackroyd didn’t strike him as the kind to break down. And he didn’t sound broken down, either.

“Maybe I can’t make that stick, about the money bein’ mine because I found it,” Ackroyd said to Innis. “I know that. But I’m not facin’ a murder rap because I pulled a guy out of a canal. He was dead. I couldn’t do anything for him. So I wound a creeper round the body to keep it hidden in the car. Then I made fast my tow-line to the front axle of his car an’ pulled it over onto its side, so it wouldn’t show above water.”

He shrugged. “It didn’t matter any to him,” he said. “And I could use that jack better’n the fish.”

“You needed money?”

Ackroyd assented sullenly. “That bingo—it’s all organized,” he said. “I wanted to buy out the guy in Miami that staked me. He was gettin’ restless.”

“What did you do with the money?”

“That’s what I’m comin’ to,” said Ackroyd. “I was afraid somebody’d think I killed Blaine if they found out about him. The money was too hot to hold. I drove on down the road. I planted it in the empty cabin. For two days I kept my ear to the ground for talk about numbers of any bills being known.”

He shrugged. “But it was just bean-pickin’ money,” he said. “Old small bills. I figured it would be safe to get it. I headed for the cabin; spotted them pickers, turned around in a hurry—and then that Wagner near hit me, going seventy miles an hour.”

He scowled venomously. “I wish he’d broke his neck!” he said. “But I’ll show you I’m on the level. I’ll take you to the jack. A guy couldn’t do fairer than that, could he?”

“Nice for Blaine’s family,” Innis said curtly.

“I saved ‘em from knowin’ he was dead,” the gambler said. “I saved ‘em the shock.”

Sam Robbins was bewildered. “He’s powerful close to bein’ honest about it!” he muttered to Innis. “I sho’ don’t like that!”

“Frisk him, Sam,” Innis said. “Then we’ll run down to the cabin.”

Sam frisked. Ackroyd wasn’t armed. “You’ve got an automatic pistol,” Innis said.

“That’s right,” Ackroyd admitted. “The Sheriff knows I keep a gun at my bingo place, for p’tection.”

“I got a gun right heah,” said Sam, tapping his armpit, “if you should need one—an’ I hope not.”

Sam rode with the gambler in the back seat. Ackroyd was a model prisoner. Nevertheless Innis himself carried the wrecking-bar they had taken from Ackroyd’s car.

The bean-pickers were gone from the cabin. Innis headed directly for the plank with the bright nail-heads.

“That’s it,” said Ackroyd. “Pry it up.” He sighed. “I’m sort o’ glad to get this money off my chest, boys.”

Sam Robbins grunted. “I like you better crooked than I do straight,” he said. “You make straightness as twisted as a pretzel, you do.”

Innis jammed the flattened end of the wrecking-bar in under the plank and bore down sharply with the other end. With a screech of drawn nails the plank came up. Innis withdrew the bar.

“Right up at this end,” said Ackroyd. He bent quickly and thrust a hand in under the flooring.

NEXT instant his hand came out again. There was an automatic pistol gripped in his fingers. He flicked it to cover Sam.

“Don’t try—” Ackroyd started.

To draw a revolver would have been suicide, so Sam launched a kick. But before Ackroyd could fire or Sam could land his foot, Innis brought his bar down hard on Ackroyd’s wrist.

The blaring gun bounced across the cabin flooring. Ackroyd grabbed his sagging wrist. That bar had been ready for use. Innis handed it to Sam.

“You tried half the truth on me before, about Sam shooting you,” Innis said. He walked over and picked up the automatic. “I’m bright enough to see a gag coming up the second time. He hid this gun because he used it on Blaine, Sam.”

“Don’t tell me, Innis,” said Sam. “It’ll he’p my self-respect some if I tell you, an’ it needs he’ping.”

Ackroyd clamped his jaw shut. His confessions were over.

Sam waved a hand toward the canal. “You found the car months too soon for him, Innis,” Sam said. “There’ll be clues still left on Blaine or his car to show it was murder. An’ when Ackroyd heard us talking about the cabin, he knew we’d sho’ find his gun that the Sheriff has the number of.”

Innis nodded.

“His only chance of making a get-away was to half-confess, lead us to the gun and shoot his way out of heah. Right?”

“Right,” said Innis. “And I congratulate you, Sam, on your alertness in pretending to fall in with Ackroyd’s scheme and shooting across Flagler Boulevard. That led him right into our arms. The Sheriff will be proud of you.”

“But I didn’t—”

“It’ll ruin the story if you welsh on me!” Innis warned.

“Oh, well,” said Sam, “two-three times when I should ha’ been a hero, it didn’t turn out that way a-tall. I’ll be a hero just to keep Ben Dunn from taking my badge away.”

The Oriental Menace

*From the October, 1923, issue we reprint this
Twice-told Tale of the looming threat in the Pacific.*

by CLARENCE
HERBERT NEW

IT is difficult to fix the exact moment when a diplomatic *coup* may be said to have had its beginning, because the origin of any particular development in international relations is usually obscure—often a chance word which starts some diplomat thinking along a certain line.

Although Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan had made the journey over the Trans-Siberian to ascertain for his own information whether conditions were getting better or worse throughout Russia, it is possible that the game which he and Earl Trevor went into, regardless of its prohibitory risk, might never have been played if the two Cabinet ministers who were dining at the Earl's famous mansion in Park Lane upon the evening of his return to London had been less well-informed than they were, or not sufficiently far-sighted to realize that the immediate menace in European conditions was overshadowed by a greater, though less imminent, one in the Far East. So this particular *coup* may be said to have had its beginning in the Premier's speech concerning the Ruhr in the House. . . .

Trevor and Countess Nan, as usual, were letting their dinner-guests do most of the talking—partly because it was their fixed policy always to let others express the decided opinions upon any subject while they remained noncommittal as long as possible and thereby gained the reputation of taking far less interest in State affairs than they actually did. They were also a trifle preoccupied, this evening, with their pleasure in having their old friend and companion safely back with them after what they knew to have been an exceedingly hazardous trip. It was Sir Abdool himself who—struck by a remark from one of the ministers—presently asked:

"In all this reparations talk against the Ruhr policy—in your Downing Street conferences—has there been no definite consideration of the Japanese question?"

"Er—just which one have you reference to, Sir Abdool?"

"There's but one great one—Japan's diplomatic understanding with the British Empire. It is generally understood, today, that you've scrapped the former Anglo-Japanese Treaty; but if you've actually done so without some 'gentlemen's agreement' underneath, it's one of the greatest blunders Downing Street has ever made."

"But—my dear sir! Consider the Dominions!"

"Oh, I know all that! Australia bars Japs; Canada bars Hindus, Malays and Japs; the Cape bars, yet admits, pretty much everything! But there should have been found some way to get around those objections and still maintain a defensive alliance with Japan in the East. Because—if there hasn't been—it drives Japan, in self-defense, to seek alliance with whatever party happens to be in control in Russia. And that means, when ruin and self-interest bring about an exploitation of Russia by Germany—as is now steadily progressing—that we have a Russo-German-Japanese Entente with almost unlimited natural resources—with probably the teeming millions of China to draw upon for army material. And it gives color to what I learned in Moscow."

"What was that, Sir Abdool?"

"Well—it is generally believed that secret conversations have taken place with Japanese representatives in Moscow during a period of several months—and that matters have reached a point where two exceptionally intelligent Bolsheviks are in daily conference with Soviet heads—being groomed and coached for a stay of several months in Tokio, where they will engage in conversations with the Genru and the younger statesmen. It is known that the Japs will be almost impossible to fool with any statements as to war-material and resources,—commercial or agricultural conditions,—because their spies have been from Archangel to Odessa—Brest-Litovsk to Vladivostok; and they know the

exact conditions in Russia. On the other hand, two men who know the general trend throughout Europe and are empowered to block out any sort of alliance they may deem expedient, would be very well received in Tokio and get a pretty close idea as to just how far Japan will go—if they're smart enough, and are sufficiently well-coached in Oriental obliquity before they start. It is said they'll be ready in another month—and Tokyo knows they're coming."

"They'll go as a special embassy, one supposes—with as impressive a suite as the Reds can get up?"

"On the contrary, Your Lordship! The Soviet heads know that would attract immediate attention—insure there being a swarm of spies in Tokio—get the whole matter into the news-sheets and practically kill its force with publicity before there is time to perfect the scheme and get it fairly organized."

"But—it's generally supposed that some kind of a secret understanding already exists between Japan and Russia."

"An understanding which could never be really threatening as long as Japan and Britain had any sort of agreement under the rose. But Tokio now definitely assumes that all such understanding is wiped out—and so now they're looking about to strengthen their position. They don't, however, care any more for publicity in their search than the Reds do. Back-stairs conversations decidedly appeal to them at present."

Trevor interposed a question here:

"Did you by any chance find out who the two Bolsheviks were, Abdool? The two who are being coached for Tokio?"

"That was naturally my first impulse—but it got me in deeper than I expected. I had to impersonate one of the Black Cossacks and do some fancy riding, standing up in the saddle, before I was accepted as a Red in sufficiently good standing to be trusted with Soviet confidences—and when I got out of Russia, I believe the Cheka were looking for me. The secret envoys are Marakanoff, an extreme radical who was formerly a university professor, and Lodjeski, who was a correspondence-clerk in a large Petrograd exporting house—speaks and writes six languages. You see, when the Reds have occasion to look about for creditable representatives to send anywhere outside, with important work to accomplish, they're rather up against it—the pick of such material having been shot by the hundred thousand

in the pits and cellars. But by raking and scraping the prisons, the department executives in various localities, they do get a few men who aren't altogether fools or crude to an impossible extent. Marakanoff and Lodjeski are far above the average in brain-capacity, as you'll infer from these snapshots I got of them. Later I made a suggestion to one of the commissars that good photographs should accompany their credentials to prevent all possibility of substitution or mistaken identity—and he thought the idea so good that he had the photographer I recommended take them from various angles. I got into that photographer's garret one night and stole a few of the prints. There are even some taken with bare faces, after temporarily shaving off their shrubbery—just to allow for all contingencies."

"My word, Sir Abdool! You must have run a frightful risk! Why did you bother with it? Of what possible value are those photographs compared to being tortured or killed, as you jolly well might have been?"

SIR ABDOOL lighted a fresh cigar and took a few thoughtful puffs before he smilingly replied: "Well—it occurred to me that if some of your Foreign Office men happened to be suffering for a bit of excitement, they might impersonate those envoys—waylay them at some point along the Trans-Siberian, put them out of business in some effective way, and go on to Japan with their credentials. As long as there is to be no suite accompanying them,—probably none on the same train who would know them but their valets,—such a substitution wouldn't be altogether impossible. Of course, the chances would be a hundred to one against its success, and the risk so great that few sane men would care to attempt it; but—think what such impersonators *might* learn as to the real secret policy of Japan—how far she would risk going in any particular direction, what dreams of world-conquest may be working in the brains of her ablest men today!"

"Oh, the devil! Such a thing is quite too foolhardy even to discuss! Still an' all, though—I fancy you're right as to what such men *could* learn if they pulled it off successfully, which of course is impossible! Again—even supposing Government were considering anything of the sort—eh? I say! Could you mention two in the F. O. who might have any chance at all at that sort of game? I can think of none."

"Well—no. None of the present staff would qualify, I fear. Several of them speak Russian and some of the dialects well enough—but not the ones who are really good at Nipponese. Of course, none of the Japs would expect a Bolshevik to understand their language fluently—I'm positive that neither Marakanoff nor Lodjeski are well up on it; but your F. O. men would get a good bit more if they did understand it fairly well. There is a man who was formerly the best King's Messenger in a century, but he hasn't been connected with the Foreign Office for several years—probably wouldn't care to undertake such a game at all. He's well past fifty, though physically as active as a man twenty years younger. I can also think of two more whose equipment of languages, nerve, resource and experience would give them a chance of pulling through—but even if they were successful, it would be a thankless job!"

"Aye—that's the worst of such work! It's so immensely valuable that one undertaking it should be entitled to almost anything in Government's power to give him—yet it's impossible to recognize it publicly. . . . H-m-m—one rather wishes you hadn't made the suggestion, Sir Abdool! The more one considers it, the more it appears that two such men, if successful, might arouse the Allied cabinets so thoroughly with the menace of Oriental consolidation as to brush aside all the petty differences which appear to be driftin' us into another beastly war unless the misunderstandings are in some way checked."

"And one peculiar feature of the situation is that they would probably discover some inwardness of conditions which will come as a surprise to the Western nations. Have you ever heard of Rudolph Koffe?"

"H-m-m—the name is vaguely familiar. A Soviet propagandist in China, is he not?"

"You might call him that. You might also call him a publicly accredited envoy to Japan—for that's what he amounts to in Tokio. The man has possibly one of the cleverest brains among all of the Soviet officials. He has been lecturing in the Chinese universities—learned a smattering both of Chinese and English in a few months. And what he is everlastingly preaching is a renaissance of Asiatic culture as the oldest and best in the world, including its philosophies. By avoiding all suggestion of military alliances, playing up 'Asia for the Asiatics' in a peaceful bond of culture and mutual interests, he has done more than any other man to solidify a liking in China for everything Russian. By the amazingly rapid increase of this influence, he has startled Japan into a position where she must throw in with such a movement—or oppose it. German emissaries in the East are backing this play in every way they can while they unceasingly build up German-controlled Asiatic development of industrial enterprises."

"From another angle—Japan has always admired German thoroughness and military efficiency—has copied them in many ways. A thousand mutual interests draw them together. Consequently, when she sees Russia and China getting thicker every day, with Germany persistently obtaining control of industrial development, is it any wonder that the force of such a combination appeals to the Nipponese mind? An international combination of unlimited resources, which can put an army of twenty million men into the field as soon as the consolidation becomes really effective! The Chinese hate war; consequently, the Soviets allay their suspicions of any ulterior object with talk of a cultural renaissance which appeals very strongly to the Chinese. But after a few years of close association and development between Russia, China, Germany and Japan, *Russia* knows, *Japan* knows and *Germany* knows, that no military power in the world can stop them from overrunning and controlling the rest of it."

"Of course, this four-power consolidation is not yet accomplished fact. It is probably within the power of Western diplomacy to draw its teeth, if the drawing is done within the next five or ten years. But unless Europe and America wake up to the situation, they'll lose whatever chance they *may* have to stop it. Japan is by no means thoroughly decided upon just how far she will go in such a direction as yet; there are various considerations which influence her against the chance of surrendering her present domination of Asiatic affairs and becoming merely one of four. That is why—with Koffe as the envoy in evidence—Marakanoff and Lodjeski are being sent very quietly, with no flourish of trumpets and no accompanying suite, to follow up whatever Koffe may have started in a more public way. . . . Their business is to find out just how far Japan is willing to commit herself at present, and size up the general feeling among the people toward such an alliance."

"Hmph! You make it appear even more vitally necessary that we somehow learn what those secret envoys actually get, Sir Abdool! But I must admit that you also demonstrate the apparent impossibility of getting it in any such ways as you suggested. That's but a wild dream—a joke! We must send two of our ablest Foreign Office men to Japan at once, and see if we can't form some opinion of what's going on under the surface!"

When the ministers had left the house, the Trevors and Sir Abdool remained in the big Jacobean library examining topographical maps of Asia. Trevor, lighting a cigar, began slowly pacing up and down before the hearth.

"Abdool—had you any definite idea of kidnapping those envoys when you left Moscow? Did you go as far as making any arrangement for getting word of their departure?"

"I had no real intention of getting hold of them within Russian territory—hadn't considered that it might be possible. But I *was* of the impression that some of the best men in Downing Street would be sent to Japan, and that

it would be an advantage to know just when those envoys started. As it happens, there are four men in Russia just now who are under heavy obligations to me—enough to risk a good deal at my request. Each of them agreed to get a radiogram through to London—a perfectly simple business message which the censors will pass. One from Moscow, one from Samara, one from Tchita—messages which they will try to duplicate, with altered wording, to a certain man in Vladivostok whose daughter I once aided."

"So that if three or four reckless fools *should* happen to be somewhere between—say—Omsk and Tchita, it would be possible, somehow, to get in touch with those four and keep track of the envoys' movements, clear across Siberia?"

"Entirely possible—but always with the chance that messages would be delayed or suppressed altogether."

"Oh, naturally—that's all in the game! Now—how about a reason for the fools being in Siberia? Of course, passports are always an unknown quantity—also the suspicions and activities of the Cheka; but our news syndicate has had less difficulty of late in getting its men through, with proper credentials. What would you say as to that? Is there a disposition to pass foreigners about the country with less risk and espionage than during the last six years?"

"Since Lenin's illness some of the more far-sighted leaders appear to have realized that without capital and credit from the outside, Russia is drifting toward utter chaos. So they're exercising some restraint over the Cheka, in the case of foreign bankers and promoters—making some effort to protect and impress them. With your hundreds of different enterprises, O friend of my father's son, it should not be difficult to provide credentials for three or four men, as a delegation to examine certain districts in Siberia with the view of organizing developing companies—mining, manufacturing, farming. It would appear entirely plausible for such men to go over the Trans-Siberian, with frequent stop-offs to inspect different localities. If two of them go as engineers, it would be quite reasonable for such men to make borings in various places for oil and mineral indications—which would take a little time—account for their staying a few weeks in one spot. In fact, a request from Downing Street to what they dignify with the name Foreign Office, in Moscow, would undoubtedly secure as much of a safe-conduct as the Soviet can give such promoters—"

"It probably would—but Downing Street can't make any such request! If the men happen to be caught in any mix-up with those envoys, it brands them at once as British secret-service men trying to block Russian politics! Downing Street must be kept entirely out of it! Your adventurous fools must tackle the game entirely on their own. But I'm thinking that if they requested an interview with the Soviet representatives in London, as shareholders in a large British development syndicate,—we could get for them letters which would be quite convincing,—the Russians would put themselves out a good bit to encourage any such tour of inspection. And they'd fall for the request that no publicity whatever be given it—no entertainment of the delegates, no chaperons to conduct them from one place to another and show them the natural possibilities. For it's supposable that many British and foreign development companies have exactly the same thing in mind—would be shadowing those delegates, step by step, if they once got on their track, to see what possibilities they were discovering and use such information, themselves."

"That might work! Yes—I fancy you could depend upon it. . . . But after getting them there, the actual kidnapping of the envoys and substitution of your adventurers is something else—something far more dangerous and difficult."

"Suppose the men were in Moscow a week or more before those men started—had a chance to study them closely, and the servants who would probably accompany them?"

"You'd have to suppose that—or else start them all on the same train. They'll be at least two or three weeks on the road before they reach Vladivostok."

"By thunder, Abdool—I'm almost tempted to have a try at this! And I'll bet Lammy'll want to go with us! Such a game would call for every bit of finesse and resource one has—'twould be worth playing for the game alone. But if successful, it *might* go a long way toward blocking any such consolidation of Eastern interests as we fear. How—I don't know! Time enough for that when we know something of Japanese ambitions or aspirations for the next hundred years—and the chance of any such coalition sticking together long enough to become the menace we fear. What do you say, Nan—shall we try it?"

"Speaking for myself alone, George, I'd say emphatically *no*! You've done enough in the last twenty years to be exempt from any duty of this sort—admitting that it is a duty under present conditions. We've all been hoping that the time is approaching when we can drop international politics for good and settle down to a quieter, happier life with our own simple interests. But—there's another side to it. There's no man in the F. O. who would stand any chance of winning out in such an adventure, none with the necessary training and experience, and cold nerve in emergencies—though there are some pretty able men in the Service. So if the object is really great enough—it would appear to be either us or nobody. I won't mess in it myself—I don't want either of you to do it! Still, if you should pull it off, the value of the service is something way beyond measuring in money. Eventually, I suppose, each one of us will do something of this sort once too often—but I fancy we should be willing to pass out just on the record of what we've already done. It's a good bit—when one adds it up!"

FOR over a month Serge Marakanoff and Ignace Lodjeski had occupied a room in the Kremlin where they spent days in going over maps, documents—being coached in regard to the personalities of various Japanese statesmen whom they would meet—devoting intensive study to acquiring enough of that language to carry on a conversation intelligently or catch side-remarks which they were not supposed to hear. Marakanoff, with his former university experience, found this much easier than his colleague, because when one has mastered two or three alien languages so that he writes and speaks them fluently, acquiring others becomes increasingly easy. To Americans, the learning of another tongue is a task of great difficulty, from the fact that they consider it superfluous cultivation rather than necessary equipment. But to Europeans, with five or six different languages in use just the other side of their borders, it is a necessity to familiarize themselves with such other tongues.

A week before the two were to leave Moscow, they met—at one of the few popular restaurants which manage to serve a fairly decent meal—three Englishmen who were making a tour of investigation for a big development syndicate. One of these had drifted easily into a discussion of people and conditions in Tokio—betraying a familiarity with Japan which he admitted was the result of several years' residence in the country. He appeared to have met and known almost all of the prominent statesmen, business magnates and tea-growers, mentioning one after another with little personal details which Marakanoff knew from his own intensive study were exceedingly accurate. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed to him a rare opportunity for getting additional information along just the lines covered by his mission. He insisted that the three accompany him back to the Kremlin for the purpose of meeting certain commissars and leaders belonging to the inner Soviet circle.

After some hesitation they consented—and the talk in a Kremlin room, with its high vaulted ceiling and remnants of once luxurious furnishings, lasted far into the night. Although the Englishmen were leaving for Omsk very shortly, the envoys managed to see them for a good part of the next five days and secured a promise that they would join them

again on the Trans-Siberian train at Omsk—going as far as Irkutsk or Tchita. The one little point in this recent acquaintance which the envoys overlooked was that they had seen nothing of a fourth Englishman who belonged to the syndicate party. Some reference had been made to him as an able engineer, but there was nothing to indicate that he would be of any use to them. The two servants who were going along, however, did run across this man once or twice in small eating-places—paying no close attention to him beyond answering some of his questions about the city and remembering his face when he left Moscow on the same train with their party. At two or three stations before the train passed Samara, they saw him stretching his legs on the platform and chatted with him. At Samara they suggested fetching his luggage into their compartment and joining them in a game of cards—two strangers happening to leave the train at that point and making room in the compartment for the servants, the Englishman, and a subordinate official who was going as far as the next stop.

THE Englishman was good company—played a good game, minded his own business, and understood only enough Russian to play cards with them intelligently. They were sure that he couldn't understand their slang at all. He drank their vodka with them, and in turn produced a bottle of Scotch whisky which proved very acceptable. After the official left at the next station and the servants had gone up to the large double compartment in a forward car to see if the envoys wanted anything, the three had the compartment to themselves.

The next run was a longer one between stops—the train being supposed to be a *rapide*—and the valets by this time were getting rather mellow. The Englishman recognized certain landmarks—and about a minute before the train reached the station, his hand passed over the nearest vodka-cup in a careless gesture. A small capsule dropped into the fluid as the hand passed over it. In another moment one of the valets was gulping the stuff down and making ready to go out on the platform.

When the train stopped, his companion hurried up forward to the envoys' car—but he accepted the Englishman's suggestion that they cross the road back of the station and see if there was any decent pipe-tobacco to be had in a little shop on the other side. As they left the platform, they were followed by a man who seemed to recognize the tiny war-medal on the Englishman's lapel, and who entered the shop immediately after them. The valet, by this time, was feeling dull and stupid—could scarcely talk. In another moment he would have pitched down upon the floor if the last man to come in hadn't caught him, saying:

"It's just one of his spells—he is subject to them. He is Vassili Koraniev—just came in from Samara on the train. I'll get a *droshky* and take him to the house of his cousin, here!"

The Englishman appeared to hesitate a moment—then agreed.

"Oh, very good! If you're quite certain that he was stoppin' off here. I was playin' cards with him in the compartment—fancy he did say somethin' about this bein' his station."

Leaving the valet in the man's charge, the Englishman was going out of the shop when he caught a whisper from the stranger as he passed:

"There's no through train for three days, sir—I'll see that he doesn't get that! He'll not catch up with you anywhere along the line!"

When the Englishman climbed into his compartment as the train was moving out, the other valet asked if he had seen Vassili anywhere.

"Why—he went across to that little shop for tobacco—and was then going up to the envoys' *coupé* to see if they wanted him for anything. Doubtless he was in their carriage when the train started."

"Hmph! He'll have an unpleasant time for the next hour if that's the case! We're not supposed to intrude upon the masters except at mealtime and bedtime, as they have much important work to do on the way."

At the next stop Gregorovitch hurried to the envoys' *coupé* in the hope of making things a bit easier for his fellow-valet, but found to his amazement that he hadn't been seen for three or four hours—the obvious presumption being that either he had been left behind or had tried to jump on the running-boards after the train was in motion and had fallen off, perhaps being seriously injured or killed. No telegram had come from the last station—inquiries by wire failed to obtain any trace of him.

One would have thought that Gregorovitch might have become suspicious and been on the lookout for something to happen in his case—but he hadn't the intelligence to imagine any possible reason for such an occurrence. In fact, he never knew how or when he was drugged at another station along the line. When he recovered consciousness, he couldn't remember that anyone had been near him when he left the train and reeled into a small outhouse used for storing lamps. The Englishman remained alone in the compartment after the train started—going through the valet's luggage very carefully and abstracting every paper or document which might be of use to him, then putting everything carefully back so that the suitcases gave no appearance of having been disturbed. He changed into another compartment at the next stop and was playing cards with two Germans when the guard came along the running-board to examine their tickets.

Of course Marakanoff and Lodjeski were greatly annoyed at the disappearance of their servants—there seemed something mysterious about it. But questioning the train-guards brought out the fact that each of the valets had been seen with men who seemed to be old friends, on the station platforms—so the only reasonable supposition was that they must have accompanied these friends to some near-by vodka-shop for a drink and failed to notice when the train was leaving. This was possible enough—and they were quite well satisfied to let it go at that. If there was no word from the servants by the time they reached Vladivostok, it wouldn't be a difficult matter to obtain two other men who could be vouched for by the Soviet officials there.

At Omsk there was a wait of several hours. Their three English acquaintances were on the platform as the train came in, according to the promise made in Moscow—the five going off to the best restaurant in the city for as good a dinner as it could provide. Afterward the Englishmen, having completed their investigations in that vicinity, got on the train to accompany them as far as Irkutsk, where the whole train was broken up and reassembled for the run to Vladivostok—a matter of nearly a day. During the run the Englishmen spent a good deal of their time in the envoys' compartment, describing what they had ascertained in their investigations, including a good deal of detail concerning Japanese cities and people which the Russians carefully wrote down in memoranda for future reference.

It was just getting dark when the train reached Irkutsk. Leaving one of the Soviet officials in charge of their compartment so as to be sure that nothing would be interfered with, the five went to the house of a Russian, who had been corresponding with the English syndicate and had invited its representatives to stay with him while in that vicinity. He seemed to be quite influential; from his knowledge of who and what the envoys were, they concluded that he must be really one of the Soviet leaders in Siberia. With all the secrecy as to their movements, it had been necessary, of course, to secure the cooperation of railway officials along the Trans-Siberian and local commissars at all the stops along the line, merely as a matter of protection for the envoys in case of unforeseen complications. That is to say, no apparent notice was taken of them, more than of other passengers, as long as nothing happened—there was no evidence whatever that they were personages of importance.

Now, the plans of the Englishmen that night hinged upon certain actions of the envoys which they had figured out in advance. If they returned to their coupé in the train-yards and spent the night there,—not taking the risk of leaving their luggage in anyone else's hands for longer than two or three hours,—it would be a simple enough matter to arrange for handling them. On the other hand, if they considered their belongings safe in the commissar's hands and spent the night in the best hotel in town, the getting hold of them would be a more difficult and dangerous job—perhaps too dangerous to risk. Which left only Tchita for what they had in mind. As it happened, however, the envoys' mental processes worked exactly as it had been supposed they would—they left the Russian's house at the outskirts of the town in his battered car at midnight, when fear of the Cheka kept most people indoors.

When the car had gone but a short distance, three men with handkerchiefs over their faces jumped upon the steps, covering the chauffeur and the two envoys with automatics. The car was turned about and driven to an isolated house in the suburbs, where the captives were taken to an upper room—each feeling a sharp pricking in one of his legs for an instant as he was passing along a dark hall, but thinking it nothing more than a pin which had worked its way down inside his clothing. They hadn't been in the room to which they were taken more than two minutes, however, before it seemed impossible to keep their eyes open. In another moment they were completely unconscious—and their captors removed the bandannas from their faces, revealing themselves as the three Englishmen and the Russian at whose house they had dined that evening. Then the chauffeur came in—and might have been recognized by some of the train-passengers as the Englishman who had been in the same compartment with the valets during the earlier part of the trip.

AFTER bolting the door, two of the party sat down by the bedside for a careful study of the envoys' features as they lay unconscious. Presently they took from a suitcase a couple of finely made false beards which they secured to their faces with an adhesive preparation flexible enough to allow full play of the facial muscles. After this they injected tiny drops of an Oriental drug under the skin in certain spots—which soon caused just enough swelling to reproduce exactly the facial contours of the envoys.

Then the chauffeur trimmed their hair until it exactly duplicated that of the captives. In color it was a close match except for a few gray streaks in that of one Englishman—easily touched out with a little dye. An exchange of clothing, jewelry, et cetera followed, until the other three looked from the impersonators to the men on the bed in amazement. The resemblance was almost unbelievable as long as they kept their mouths shut—and when they spoke, imitating the accent and little unconscious mannerisms of the envoys, it was evident that they could pass anywhere without question. After the others had drawn a breath of relief at their success thus far, one of the masqueraders asked the darker man of the other three:

"Now—what are you going to do with *them*, Abdool? Your degrees in medicine and surgery, which we supposed merely a pastime, have demonstrated their value before this—but if you can do what you say you can with these birds, it will simply clinch the matter!"

The man addressed as Abdool sat down by the bedside and examined the faces of the unconscious men very carefully—pinching and pulling the muscles into ridges and lumps. Calling for a razor and lather-brush which had been provided, he shaved both of them closely. Then, bathing the faces with an antiseptic solution, he produced a lancet and made small incisions in various places—several of the muscles slightly altering their position as he did so. Sterilizing the tiny cuts until the bleeding stopped, he put away his implements and got up with a smile to look at his handiwork.

"Their faces will be a trifle sore for a few days, but nature heals little cuts like that very quickly, and they'll be none the worse for the operation—perfectly able to go about and attend to their affairs as they always have. Only—nobody who knew them will ever recognize that pair as the same men again! I've almost severed the small ligaments at the ends of certain muscles—which has the effect of relaxing the normal pull upon them and letting down the contracting power in spots. You notice that the whole appearance of the faces has changed in little ways. The changes are slight—yet you'd swear they are not the same men we brought in here. Not one of the train-crew or commissars will recognize them! Examination of the photographs in their passports will prove conclusively that they are impostors. You can turn them loose outside the city by noon tomorrow, Daghlileff, and let them do what they please, as long as they don't suspect that you were mixed up in this. Don't let them see you. We'll leave enough money in their clothes so that they can go anywhere they like. And now—back to the train!"

When they reached the envoys' compartment, at the train-yards, the sleepy commissar who had been left in charge never suspected them for an instant. He said that nobody had been in any part of the coupé since they drove away for dinner. When asked if it would be possible to hold the train in Irkutsk until night,—as they expected telegrams from Moscow which might not arrive before then,—he assured them that there would be no difficulty at all in doing that. When he left and the doors of the big compartment had been locked, Abdool wanted to know just why the train was to be delayed.

"Because it's safer to settle the question of identity right now—so conclusively that we'll not be under suspicion farther along the line. . . . I expect those envoys to start something as soon as they're able to think and talk, in the morning. Neither of them will realize how different he looks in spite of his shaved face—they'll go straight to the commissar, demanding our arrest. He'll think they're crazy—be about to chuck them in prison; but their story will be pretty straight—they'll remind him of things that were said when they left him in charge of the compartment. He'll remember that he was pretty sleepy when we came back here, and begin to wonder if there's really anything in the story—then he'll bring them down here to confront us and we'll have a show-down. If we convince him—that settles it!"

As the supposed Marakanoff had figured, while he and the pseudo-Lodjeski were going through some of the papers they had found in the luggage—instructions, lists of names and the like—and their two companions were on the platform outside, cursing the delay, the commissar arrived with two angry and very much excited men, who were struck dumb when they entered the big compartment and saw their doubles calmly smoking at the table as they worked. One glance practically satisfied the commissar, but Lodjeski shrieked:

"The passports! *The passports!* Make them show you their passports! You'll see! There are pictures of us both with our beards and smooth shaved!"

The commissar turned to the envoys with a grin.

"It's ridiculous, comrades! But you see my position? I'm held accountable to investigate even such a cock-and-bull story as this! Would you object to letting me see your passports?"

"Of course not! Here they are! Examine them as carefully as you please. These men are crazy, of course—but there seems to be method in their insanity. Let us investigate it by all means!"

A single look at the identifying pictures inside made the commissar's lip curl with contempt. He held the photographs before them—then pointed to a mirror on the bulkhead. Marakanoff's eyes fairly bulged in horror as he made his own comparison—his own face in the mirror and that in the photographs simply didn't belong to the same man, and he knew it was useless to argue the matter. But he had

more intelligence and resource than his double gave him credit for—nearly turning the tables in one short second. Whirling around, his arm shot out straight for his impersonator's false beard. Had his fingers obtained a firm grasp upon it, the game would have been up right there—but the supposed Lodjeski's fist caught him upon the point of the jaw, and he listened to angel voices for several minutes on the floor of the compartment. Had the man at the table made the slightest effort to dodge his attack,—shown by the quiver of a muscle that he anticipated or feared any touch upon his beard,—it might have aroused suspicion in the mind of the closely watching commissar. But the supposed Marakanoff actually allowed the frenzied man's fingers to touch the ends of the hairs without moving a muscle. When his assailant had been knocked senseless and Lodjeski was covered by a heavy-calibered automatic, the man at the table calmly lighted a fresh cigar and appeared to be considering the whole occurrence. Presently he said:

"Commissar, there's something rather serious behind all this. Our two valets, who left Moscow with us, disappeared very mysteriously on the way. We supposed that they met friends on the station platforms—went off to some near-by shop to have a drink—and missed the train. But no word of any sort has come from them. Now, we have these two apparently crazy men claiming that we are impostors—that they are the real envoys—demanding our arrest, and permission to proceed in our places. Suppose they had convinced you that they were telling the truth—and you arrested us—and let them proceed in our places? Do you see where that would put our secret mission? In the hands of unknown conspirators—using it for their own purposes—against the safety and foreign policy of Russia! This matter may be a good deal more serious than it first appeared! Have you searched these men thoroughly? Do so! Examine any papers they have—and every stitch of their clothing!"

Just why the two had neglected to see what was in the pockets of the strange suits in which they found themselves can only be explained upon the supposition that they were too crazily intent upon securing the arrest of the impostors before the train left, to think of anything else—which, of course, was natural enough. The inside pockets of their coats produced several letters from Berlin written to Wilhelm Kraft and the Herr Carl von Hohenburg in care of a German forwarding agent in Moscow—letters referring to some business enterprise which might, with a little imagination, be construed as applying to this matter of the envoys. Secured with safety-pins to inside waistcoat pockets were passports made out in the same names, but with the photographs missing. A few remaining fragments of the corners showed where they had been pasted in. The plain inference was that Marakanoff and his companion had removed the picture identification to give the impression that their own passports had been stolen from them and these substituted. The commissar drew this inference at once—and the proof of conspiracy was so conclusive against them that they would have been shot within an hour had not the masqueraders offered what seemed to the commissar a valuable suggestion:

"Of course, the obvious thing in a case like this is to shoot them as soon as possible—but if you do that, it removes all chance of tracing out where the plot started. These fellows may be merely tools of some political organization working against Russia. In that case, it would be foolish to shoot them and let the scoundrels in the background escape. The poor devils are probably actors—hard up, not earning enough to fill their bellies, jumping at a chance like this to make a stake. Anyhow—my suggestion is to keep the two for a year or more if necessary and see if you can get any connection between them and our valets' disappearance. Set the Cheka at work upon the case. Watch the letters or telegrams coming into Irkutsk. Meanwhile, I'll get word to you in case further evidence comes to our notice."

The real Lodjeski was nearly crazy—commenced shrieking abuse at the two masqueraders for what the commissar gathered was the prospect of imprisonment if not execution. But Marakanoff shut him up.

"It might have been worse, comrade! These Excellencies have but to say the word, and we'll be shot in some filthy cellar within an hour—we really owe our lives to them! Perhaps we four may come together again at some other time when we can repay a little of the debt—with interest. Until that time comes, we'd better keep our mouths shut."

As the commissar understood this, it was practically an admission of conspiracy against the envoys and acceptance of their defeat. In the circumstances it was natural enough that they should hint at future revenge if the chance ever came their way. He jotted down detailed memoranda of the affair in his official records so convincingly that when a subsequent inquiry came from Moscow, it settled all doubt as to the impossibility of any substitution having occurred.

WHEN the train was on its way again and the other two Englishmen had been invited into their compartment, there was some discussion as to their next move toward strengthening their position, and the supposed Marakanoff raised the problem of their beards:

"It's going to be a nuisance to remove them each day while we shave, and then replace them exactly right. Aside from that, a false beard is always a risk—one never knows when something will catch and rip it loose. With the passport photographs to copy, we can make up with smooth faces to correspond with them as well as with all this foliage. My suggestion would be to let two of the train-guards hear us discussing the matter of shaving, when they come in to examine the tickets next time—we can be arguing the question for one reason or another. Then, when they see us shaved next morning, they will recall the conversation and comment upon it among themselves, while the next examination of our passports by the commissar at Tchita will thoroughly establish the identification. After that, it's a very simple matter to let our own beards grow and give them the exact appearance of those in the photographs."

This decision was carried out with entire success—two of the train-guards being so interested in the discussion that they repeated it to the rest of the crew with the warning to look out for the changed appearance of the envoys in the morning. As they were all expecting it and visualizing their distinguished passengers as smooth-shaved, there was no difficulty in recognizing them. Meanwhile the supposed Marakanoff had carefully typewritten full reports of the attempted substitution and sent them back to the proper officials in Moscow, it being a simple matter to forge the signature, with a little practice, from that on his passport. Documents found in the luggage, of course, gave them practically all the inside information they needed in referring to various details of their mission and knowing whom they were supposed to communicate with. They even sent back telegrams in a private code which they found sewed inside the lining of Marakanoff's coat. At Tchita their faces—even with a few days' growth of beard—were so unmistakably those pictured in the passports that the local commissar never evidenced the slightest doubt of them.

When the train reached Vladivostok, they were met by two men from Downing Street who had been cabled to disguise themselves as Russians and apply—with recommendations which they had little trouble in obtaining—for the positions of valets to replace those who had so mysteriously disappeared. These men had received no instructions whatever from the Foreign Office, which knew absolutely nothing of their action until long afterward. The cables had been signed with a name which they knew was frequently used by Earl Lammerford of St. Ives—formerly Dean of the King's Messengers—and when de-coded, it read:

If you feel like a bit of hair-raising adventure with humorous side to it, make up as Russian valets to replace two missing ones. Await arrival of secret envoys Marakanoff and Lodjeski—Vladivostok. Should reach there in about a month. See commissar. Say telegraphed for to supply vacancies. Cook up fake cablegram. He will know when envoys expected. Meet train. Ask for men by name—not title.

FRANCIS LANGDON.

As Twombly and Akeley had been marking time at the Peking embassy with leave due them any day they cared to apply for it, they jumped at the opportunity for "seeing life," as they expressed it—there being a fixed belief in the Service that anything in which Earl Lammerford and his friends were mixed up promised more risk, adventure and opportunity for brilliant, nervy action than anything else likely to come their way. Thus, the secret mission from Moscow reached Tokio—duly accredited and very satisfactorily welcomed—in the persons of four clever Englishmen instead of Russians—another two Englishmen arriving at the same time with no apparent connection.

There were official "conversations" almost every day for a month—with cipher radiograms and letters going back to Moscow quite frequently, and as many reaching the envoys from there. Contrary to the anticipations of the Soviet officials, neither Marakanoff nor Lodjeski appeared to be getting as favorable an impression of the Nipponese attitude as they had been led to expect.

By way of Aomori and the Tsugaru Strait, it is a short trip to Vladivostok—and occasional letters found their way back which appeared to have been mailed by one of the valets in Vladivostok to insure against the possibility of their being read by any of the Japanese. In these letters the doubts were more freely expressed. According to Marakanoff, the Japanese were favorably inclined to the alliance on the surface, but with very decided reservations underneath. In fact, he claimed to have noticed upon several occasions evidences of strong feeling against him and Lodjeski among the people in the street,—even among some of the statesmen,—and expressed some apprehension of assassination at the hands of irresponsible radicals.

ALL this covers in a general way their activities for over two months—the supposed envoys demanding in most instances the extreme which they were authorized to ask on behalf of the Soviet rather than adopting the more conciliatory attitude they were supposed to follow. They gave the impression of cocksureness at Moscow—the attitude of a power holding all the strong cards and able to force the play at any moment—the impression of already having so much control in China, thanks to the Koffe propaganda, that they *could* freeze Japan into isolation if they cared to, or if they were antagonized too far by hesitation upon her part. All this, of course, was very far from the Muscovite intention. It had been authorized, in case the envoys decided their only chance was a display of firmness, but none of the Soviet officials believed it would be even advisable. And the immediate effect upon the Japanese statesmen was naturally antagonizing—supposing, as they did, that they were in much the stronger position. The Nipponese were disappointed. An alliance which had promised much advantage to them now appeared to have so many strings to it that a good deal of further consideration seemed advisable. So they temporized.

It must be admitted that the envoys played the game as unmistakable Russians. While socially pleasant and courteous, they bullied diplomatically—betrayed the Tartar in them at every step. It was really one of the most finished bits of impersonation diplomacy has ever seen—if diplomatic circles could have known the truth and admired the brilliant finesse.

Eventually there came a time when the pseudo-envoys knew that they must extricate themselves from the situation if they were to get out of it alive. Upon several oc-

casions they had known that they were under constant espionage from the Japanese secret service—with the excuse that the Government was responsible for their safety. So Marakanoff's first move was to exchange visits with his two English acquaintances who were staying at the Grand Hotel on the Bund at Yokohama—he and Lodjeski having a suite at the Imperial in the Uchi-Yamashita-cho, Tokio. On the day when the famous yacht *Ranee Sylvia*—belonging to Trevor—dropped anchor inside the Yokohama jet-ties, the envoys took an electric train down, called for the two Englishmen, and went with them to Kamakura to see the great bronze Buddha, giving the valets a holiday which they spent in visiting friends on one of the steamers at Yokohama. The party returned from Kamakura in time for a late dinner at the Grand Hotel—afterward going up to their friends' private suite for a smoke.

Half an hour later a couple of Englishmen in tweeds came out of that suite at a moment when the floor-page and house-detective happened to have their attention temporarily fixed upon the door of another room, and went down to the lobby—whence they strolled out along the Bund to the steamer-*hatoba* and got into a yacht-launch. They were seen, of course, by the secret service men—but there was no reason for shadowing them. The hotel-clerks thought they recognized their faces as guests at some time or other, though not stopping there at the time. Somewhat later they saw the two Englishmen come down and leave the hotel—but without their Russian friends—which left the secret service men up in the air. They couldn't ask the Englishmen what had become of them—would have learned nothing if they had. So they watched the hotel all night without getting a trace of the envoys.

Meanwhile the valets had called a boatman and had themselves rowed from the passenger-steamer to the big white yacht, shortly after dark—the two Englishmen in tweeds had reached her in the launch—and the others from the Grand Hotel came aboard later. In the morning a party from the yacht consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Trevor, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives, Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, the Honorable Raymond Carter, of Washington, the Honorable Martin Twombly and Sir Frederick Akeley, of Downing Street, came ashore to call upon two of the Japanese princes. After remaining at Yokohama for another day, during which her cruising-party was seen at the houses of prominent Japanese in Tokio—the yacht left for Hongkong.

At dinner, the first night out, some one proposed a toast to "the Russian secret envoys—and their suite"—after which the question was asked whether their luggage and papers had been left at the Imperial Hotel, or had been destroyed. And Earl Trevor answered it.

"That was the cream of the whole joke! All the luggage and papers were left, as they naturally would have been when those envoys so mysteriously disappeared. Everything will be overhauled by the Japanese secret service—naturally. And instructions from Moscow will be found, indicating an amount of international duplicity which will make Japanese statesmen very cautious in all their future dealings with the Russians—which is a result not altogether displeasing to us. Meanwhile—I've a letter in my pocket which Sir Frederick will take up to Vladivostok and mail to Moscow. Among other things, it says:

"We are becoming increasingly positive that our assassination has been decided upon—possibly in a way to give the impression of accidental death—possibly disappearance which never will be explained. All preparations have been made for our escape, with the assistance of friends we think are trustworthy. They will get us aboard one of the foreign steamers just before sailing time. Will cable after we escape—unless we are betrayed."

"Now, when Marakanoff and Lodjeski never do turn up again, what's the answer? Eh? Rather interesting game, I call it—and—er—not without some risk, all things considered. What?"



The Japanese bombings of Chungking have had dramatic echoes in the United States—as witness this seventh story of the “Some Call It Luck” series.

JIM HARDESTY looked across the desk at gaunt, flint-eyed John Cavendeen. “So you’re convinced,” the lawyer said grimly, “that when I said Miss Negli was in peril, I knew what I was talking about?”

“Your knowledge is as evident as your genial heart,” Hardesty snapped. “Apparently success has gone to your head.”

“It would, naturally. I was broke and hungry. You gave me an impossible, fantastic, hopeless job. So far I’ve succeeded, to your astonishment.”

“Granted. Will you have a cigar?”

To Hardesty’s amazement, Cavendeen produced a box of excellent Havanas, took one himself, and held a match for his visitor. Then, pulling at the weed with enjoyment, the lawyer permitted himself a thin smile.

“Since you’ve been collecting these extra-legal claims on behalf of Chosan Corporation, you’ve done quite well. You’ve made yourself financially independent, Mr. Hardesty. Of course, we assigned you one-third of your collections on the premise—”

“That I’d make none,” Hardesty intervened. “That any collection was impossible. I’ll admit that the whole set-up is cockeyed to the nth degree. . . . But I’ve won out. And our agreement is signed and legalized, so don’t try to cut down the future percentages.”

Cavendeen actually chuckled. “Only two claims remain to be settled. They’re not so easy as the others. Is Miss Negli still ready to assist you?”

“If necessary. We’re working together.”

“For her own sake, I hope you’ll leave her out of these last two cases. Here’s the usual thousand dollars for expenses.” The lawyer handed over a sheaf of bills and a sealed envelope. “Also the details of our claim against John Wall. I haven’t time to discuss them, but Cavendeen & Carver will do their best for you if you land in prison or the morgue.”

“Thanks,” Hardesty said, rising. “The cigar still tastes good.”

In the taxicab, he had time for only a brief glance at the contents of the

envelope, before alighting at the expensive hotel where Stella Negli was meeting him for luncheon. As he ascended to the lobby, he saw that he was well ahead of the hour. He caught sight of Scrimson, one of the assistant managers; to Scrimson, indirectly, he owed his present job. Scrimson shook hands cordially.

“How goes it, Mr. Hardesty?”

“Queerly,” said Hardesty. “Queerly. It was a cockeyed thing you got me into. Know anything about it?”

“Very little. With Chosan Corporation, I think, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. A defunct corporation, Scrimson. Headquarters located in Chungking, and bombed out of existence by the Japs. The whole headquarters staff killed; what remained of the organization was looted by treachery. Everybody grabbed anything in sight and scrambled with it. Miss Negli—your remember her?”

“Perfectly, sir! A most estimable young lady!”

“She was the only survivor of the corporation her father had headed.



by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

She's meeting me for lunch in a few minutes. My job is to pick up the fragments of Chosan that remained, on her behalf. I've done very well at it."

"I'm pleased to hear it," said Scrimson, with unction.

"See here! You can help me with something. You have knowledge, in this boarding-house of yours, of practically everyone in the country. Did you ever hear of John Wall, from some Indiana town?"

"Wall?" Scrimson pursed his lips. "The name is familiar, yes. . . . But, Mr. Hardesty, it is quite impossible for me to give you any information from our files."

"Check it," said Hardesty abruptly. "All I want is some personal line on the guy. Nothing confidential at all. Just what you might legitimately hand out to any reporter."

"Let me speak with the cashier," said Scrimson, and disappeared. After a few moments he returned, beaming. "It's all right, sir; Mr. Wall is not a regular client. We know very little about him, in fact. He is a wealthy

man who lives in Carson, Indiana, and has inherited great amounts of money from various relatives. At this season, I believe, he is to be found in Florida. He is a man of—er—shall I say, exotic tastes? I fear that I cannot say more, except that caution should be used in any dealings with him."

"Thanks, Scrimson. It's a hint, at least. . . . Ah, here comes Miss Negli!"

She was coming from the Park Avenue entrance, moving across the lobby with that peculiarly floating step of hers. Hardesty went to meet her and held up his hand.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, pointing to the pattern on the huge carpet. "Look there!"

Startled, she looked. "What is it? I don't see anything!"

"Look again! Scrimson, do you see that curlicue in the carpet?"

"Why, yes!" Scrimson scowled down. "I see nothing wrong, Mr. Hardesty!"

"Wrong? Look, man! Look, Stella! Right in front of your eyes!"

They looked at the carpet, and back to his earnest features.

"But what?" demanded Stella Negli. "What is it?"

Hardesty grinned. "The spot where I stood when I first saw you! How goes it, Stella? You know Mr. Scrimson, I think? Then come along, because I'm famished."

She shook hands. They left Scrimson, laughing, and went on to lunch.

"Silly!" she exclaimed. "Did you see John Cavendeen?"

"I'm not talking about it," he rejoined firmly. "Not at all. You're out of this job. You've run into enough danger. I don't know why this is dangerous, but it is."

Her lips twitched slightly. "Mr. John Wall is still at his Miami residence. Are you going there?"

"On the first plane. You're not. I'm going to push this claim all by myself." Hardesty meant his words. His dark, thinly cut features were set in decision. "You can tell me what you know about the claim and help me as much as you can."

Somewhat to his surprise, Stella Negli merely shrugged and made no

protest. Over the luncheon-table she talked freely. Chosan's claim against Wall was for a hundred thousand dollars; Wall's brother had borrowed this amount from the corporation that employed him.

"My father held his note," she said. "It was destroyed with everything else in the headquarters at Chungking. Wall was killed at the same time; he was a mining engineer of high ability, associated with my father, and with the organization. His brother, John Wall, refuses to admit the claim, though he inherited a good deal of wealth from the brother. He's a hard man. You'll have no approach to him. He cares for nothing in the world except his own pleasure and money and influence; politics is his only hobby. He's known at Washington—will be an ambassador one of these days, they say. That sort."

Hardesty frowned. "Something missing; the picture's out of focus. He must have some human interest! Friends, children, relatives?"

She hesitated. "Yes. I think Mr. Cavendish covered that point in his instructions. I can add nothing to it. I met the lady once; she was a sweet creature, devoted to him, but he's hard with her, as with everyone. I don't imagine he's capable of love. Their relationship must be tragic for her. He ignores all conventions. Naturally, their only friends are of the racing and sports world, and a few politicians. He's hard, hard, hard!"

More than this, she could not or would not say.

Hard, hard, hard! The words lingered in Hardesty's mind when he had made his plane reservation for that evening, and sat poring over the contents of Cavendish's envelope.

THIS consisted of a few lines of typing and two photographs. The typing covered the details of Wall's brother and the loan, then proceeded:

"Known as Mrs. Wall and mistress of his household is Zoe Koulis, undivorced wife of General Koulis of the Greek army staff. This international scandal has lasted for several years and is typical of the man's arrogant disregard of everything except his own selfish interests."

One photograph showed John Wall, a man of thirty-five, vigorous, alert, with a clipped mustache over a firm mouth and chin; with him was Zoe Koulis, a dark beauty. The other photograph was of the note for one hundred thousand dollars. Hardesty frowned at it.

"Hm! By some chance, this photo exists. . . . But a photo isn't legal evidence! Too bad. And where's any danger for Stella Negli in this? Wall isn't going to shoot her, or me either, for trying to collect a debt. A hundred thousand is just flypaper

to him. As usual, the layout looks screwy in the extreme."

So screwy, in fact, that it worried him. He looked up John Wall, found the man was worth several millions, but learned nothing new. Later in the afternoon he rang Stella; she was out. He packed and made his evening plane, feeling uncomfortably blank about the whole prospect.

MORNING, in Miami. He located the Wall villa—down-coast, well out of town—and rented a car by the week. After lunch he set forth, somewhat desperately, with nothing in mind except the forlorn hope of driving straight at his objective and seeing what happened. Crafty tricks and guile were not in his book.

The season was getting a bit late; the sun was hot on the far sea, hot on the white coral sand. He drove past estates and palaces and shoddy replicas of grandeur new and old; everywhere the sprawling stamped beauty of money poured out like water . . . the beauty of an honest lass tricked out with paint and powder and dye. It came to him that John Wall was one of these men who had money and nothing else, money as a compensation for all the other things they lacked and loved not. Hard, hard, hard! Hard men in a reeling, shaken world that spilled its own blood with brutal fury just across this sparkling sea. . . .

There it was ahead: Hurricane House, the sign read, in grim challenge to gods and local custom alike; one does not speak of hurricanes in wind-devastated country. The gates were ajar, and Hardesty turned in. He glimpsed white buildings huddled up from the white beach, and palms with rustling fronds eloquent in the sea-breeze, and everywhere flowers, whole hillsides of flowers ablaze with color.

A telegraph messenger pedaled past him and away. A telegram delivered . . . he thought nothing of it at the moment. He was drinking in the beauty of those sudden flower expanses; there must be a small army of gardeners at work here, he was thinking. Then the drive twisted in a curve ahead. A car was standing off the road. Two figures were near it, among the flowers that blazed so gayly. . . . No, one figure!

Hardesty slammed on his brakes. He stared with unbelieving eyes as his car halted. This slim white shape coming toward him—why, it was impossible! The sun must have put things into his head. He had left her in New York; she could not be here. But she was coming closer, calling something to him. . . .

He got out of the car. Yes, it was Stella Negli; it was her dusky-golden cheek, her delicately etched features, her deep dark eyes, her voice!

"You! It's like a dream!" he exclaimed. "You can't be real!"

"Help me! You must help me with her!" she was saying, breaking in upon him. "She got a telegram while we were talking; now she's crumpled up in the sun and there's no one around! Come and help."

She hurried ahead of him and sank to her knees beside the figure of another woman, lying among the flowers.

"Who is that?" Hardesty demanded. "And how did you get here?"

"Zoe Koulis," she breathed hastily. "It? It doesn't matter. I wanted to get here ahead of you, and I did. Careful, now! She had clippers in her hand; I'm afraid she's fallen on them."

Hardesty stooped. From the photograph, he recognized the face of the fallen woman, a dark, sweet, pathetically lovely face; then an exclamation broke from him. In one hand she held the crumpled message, but there was blood on her other arm, as he turned her. The garden clippers had cut a gash in the white skin, nothing worse. He tied his handkerchief about the injury, then gathered the woman up in his arms.

"Get my car door open," he said. "Sit inside and I'll pass her in to you."

Stella was already on the way. He staggered under his burden, out to the car and to the open door, lifted her in, and grunted in relief as Stella balanced the unconscious woman. He closed the car door, carefully.

"Where's Wall?" he demanded.

"Not here. Playing polo. They don't expect him back until late."

He passed around the car and climbed in beside her. The hot white sunlight was all empty, as he headed on toward the buildings. He heard Stella speaking again.

"I thought I might do it better than you, Jim; less danger for me, perhaps. She was talking with me about the flowers, her flowers. It's what she loves; she does it all herself. Poor thing! It's the only occupation she has in her life."

He circled the car for the entrance doorway.

"Danger? I don't get it at all," he said. "But since you're here, all right."

"Can't explain now; apparently the danger's from him, from his violence. I must take care of her now; it's my chance to effect something. Wake 'em up! Ring the bell!"

HARDESTY rang the bell and then he drummed with the huge knocker. They came suddenly, half a dozen of them at once, running—men and women servants all in a flurry.

The woman was carried in; Stella Negli went along. Hardesty picked up something from the floor of his car. It was the message; not a telegram, but a radiogram. He found a butler



beside him, questioning, and a few words explained the accident.

"I'm having the doctor summoned, sir. Will you come in and wait in the library? I'll have your car put up and send word to Mr. Wall. You are a friend of the family?"

"No; I wanted to see him on business. Yes, I'll come in, thanks; and will you tell Miss Negli I'm waiting?"

In the library, a large and cheerful room, Hardesty waited and looked out upon the beach and the sea. He lit a cigarette; suddenly he remembered the radiogram which he had thrust into his pocket. Smoothing it out, he glanced at the words:

AGATHA KILLED YESTERDAY IN PIRAEUS
BOMBING GEORGE A PRISONER OF GER-
MANS AM WRITING.

HELENA.

Hardesty put the message on the table. Her relatives, no doubt; this explained the sudden fainting-spell.

A car arrived; a doctor was taken through to another part of the house; after a little Stella Negli appeared, hatless. She came quickly to him.

"I'm going to stay; she doesn't want me to leave. You read the message?"

*"Who is that?" he demanded.
"And how did you get here?"*

It was her child, her little daughter, who was killed. Her husband a prisoner; poor woman! I can do her some good by staying, perhaps."

"As you like. It may help us—"

"No, no!" she broke in. "That's not worthy of you. I thought so at first, too, but now it's different. She's really stricken."

"You say there's danger from him? That he's violent?"

"I don't know." She met his gaze frankly. "I think any talk of danger is nonsense, really. Tell me where you're staying; I'll give you a call later. So far as I'm concerned, there can be no thought about the claim at present."

So they parted. Hardesty drove back to town and his hotel, aware of a queerly electric sensation somewhere in his brain—a tingling, prickling sensation as though he were on the verge of something frightful and his brain knew it, while he did not. A premonition? He could not tell. He had heard his father speak of such a sensation, but it was new to him, and

oddly disturbing. Sheer case of nerves, he told himself, and had a drink to chase it away.

He had thought of Zoe Koullis with a certain cynical intolerance which was natural; after all, he was only twenty-four, and youth finds little excuse for such situations. Yet the memory of her stricken features haunted him, and gave him a faint realization of the tragedy encompassing her, in spite of the world's luxury with which her lover surrounded her.

Not until late afternoon did he get the promised call from Stella; then it was brief.

"John Wall's on the way to see you, Jim. You and someone else."

"Meaning what?"

"Can't say." She was phoning from the villa, of course, and must be careful of her words. "I'm still in the dark regarding any danger. But I'm staying here for a day or two. She's in rather bad shape, it seems, and wants me. So I'll see you at dinner."

"How-come?"

"He's bringing you out here for dinner," she explained, and hung up.

Hardesty pondered the message. "You and someone else." What did it

mean? Perhaps nothing; perhaps much. It remained foggy to him.

He was sitting in the hotel lobby when the final edition of the *Evening News* came to the cigar counter, and buying a paper he glanced through it. A name caught his eye: "*JOHN WALL HURT . . . Poloist Out of Match.*" He fastened attentively on the story, even with incredulity, until he perceived it was of no great importance.

During a practice match early in the afternoon, Wall had been knocked out; in the course of a scrimmage, a mallet had hit him almost between the eyes. He had suffered no great damage but a doctor in attendance had forbidden further polo for a few days. Hardesty had just finished the story when he heard his name being paged. Wall had arrived.

A MOMENT later he was shaking hands with the bronzed, hard-jawed man of the photograph. Wall was cordial in the extreme.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am to you and Miss Negli," he said heartily. "Don't say it's nothing at all; to me it means a tremendous lot, Hardesty. I want to take you out to the house for the evening. . . . Come along just as you are. No formality there. I have to pick up a chap at the Coral Tavern, who's here on business—"

"Hold on a minute," broke in Hardesty. This warmth of gratitude embarrassed him. "I can't accept, Mr. Wall, under false pretenses. The reason I went to your house today was to see you regarding a claim against you, on behalf of Chosan Corporation."

Wall looked at him for a moment, then broke into a laugh and clapped him on the arm.

"Oh, that! Forget it! We'll discuss it later on. I like your frankness, damned if I don't! Come along to the car."

Hardesty complied. "You don't show any mark of your accident," he observed. "I was just reading about it in the paper."

Wall laughed again. "They're hard up for news. I got a good clip and no mistake, but it was nothing to make a fuss over. Didn't leave a mark, as you say. Left a beastly headache, but a bit of aspirin fixed that up. You know, I can't get over the stroke of luck that brought you and Miss Negli there just at the right moment! Zoe doesn't like servants tagging along, and spends hours every day with her flowers. She might be lying there yet, except for you."

The trim Negro chauffeur swept the big car away with deft touch. Hardesty studied his companion as they chatted. Behind the affability, he discerned singular things. Hard, hard, hard! No doubt of that. Yet there was something more, something that puzzled him. Fear? It seemed most

unlikely, in such a man, yet he read it as fear none the less. And, back of this, strange soft depths that also puzzled him. He agreed fully with Stella Negli; any idea of danger was silly.

Yet he knew that John Cavendeen was never silly.

"Here we are. Come along in with me," said Wall, and Hardesty obeyed. As they entered the imposing hotel, Wall continued under his breath: "Want to size the chap up before taking him along. Can't be too careful these days."

It was fear, then! But why?

Their man was Nicholas Gore, a trim, soldierly man of thirty, with a jaw heavy as that of Wall himself and darkly slumbrous eyes. Hardesty was surprised to hear Wall question him at some length regarding his business, which was to discuss the purchase of a yacht that Wall's agents were offering for sale; from this, Wall drove into Gore's personal affairs with what amounted to arrogance. Upon learning that Gore was a Canadian by birth and might want to use the yacht for war work, he thawed abruptly and became as gracious as he had been arrogant.

"Come along to the house for the evening," he said. "We'll talk about it after dinner. Something in your face reminded me of a chap I used to know—but never mind that now. I have some business to discuss with Hardesty before dinner, then I'll be free."

All three got into the car and were on their way. Hardesty still found himself puzzled; for no reason, he was tense and alert and watchful. Yet there was no tension in the air. Gore proved to be pleasant, humorous, distinctly charming in manner; he had been a world traveler before the war, and talked absorbingly of his experiences.

Reaching Hurricane House, John Wall cocked an eye at the butler and disposed of his guests like a field-marshal.

"Take Mr. Gore to the library and make him comfortable. Show Mr. Hardesty to my room and send up something to drink; I'll join you, Hardesty, as soon as I have a word with Mrs. Wall." He turned to Gore. "Look here, old chap! If it hadn't been for this beastly headache, I'd have thought of it before! You can spend the night, can't you? We'll send to the hotel for your things, if you need 'em, but I have everything you'd need. . . . You will? Of course you will! So instead of the library, we'll put Mr. Gore in the large guest-room."

Gore's protests were quite disregarded. He was led off to his fate. John Wall vanished. Hardesty found himself installed in a palatial study

and bedroom, distinctly horsy in its display of trophies and ribbons. A servant brought bottles and glasses, setting them on the desk and mixing Hardesty a drink. And here, quickly, came John Wall, sending the servant out with abrupt gesture, pouring himself a shot and swallowing it, then sinking into a chair and fastening a brooding gaze on Hardesty.

"She's not doing so well; the shock went deep. You know the cause?"

Hardesty nodded. "I read the message, after she dropped it."

"Yes. You'd know all there was to know about me, coming on your errand." Wall spoke not bitterly, but as of ordinary accepted fact. "So she's lost the child! You wouldn't know what that means to her. All her soul was wrapped up in that little girl."

Yet she had left that child and run away with this man. The thought flashed across Hardesty's mind; then a flush sprang to his cheek, as Wall looked at him and nodded gravely.

"Yes; she ran away with me. That was a different sort of love . . . her soul with the child, her heart and life with me. Oh, you needn't look astonished! I'm no mind-reader, but I know what you'd think. But, by heaven, you don't know why I'm talking this way to you—why I'm laying myself naked to a bill-collector!"

A muttered apology, and he reached for the bottle again. His hand was unsteady as he swigged the drink.

"The aspirin's worn off," he said, as though this excused everything. "I'm taut as a drum, too. Hardesty, something's going to happen! What is it?"

"I wish I knew," said Hardesty. "I have the feeling myself."

"I thought it was about—her accident. It's not that." Wall held a hand over his eyes, pressing against them, as he spoke—a strong, hard hand. Then he looked up. "Wonderful girl, that Miss Negli! Who is she? Where from?"

HARDESTY told about Chosan, about Stella Negli; as he talked, he realized that he was speaking to a different person; the John Wall before him was a new and unsuspected man. He displayed the photograph of the note, his own power of attorney to act for Chosan, he told how Stella Negli was salvaging a little, here and there, from the wreckage caused by Japanese bombs; and all the while a sense of overwhelming wonder was creeping upon him. The man was changed. It was as though all the brisk, hard shell were laid back to reveal the real man within. A man of depth and warmth and—

"What are you afraid of?" Hardesty asked abruptly.

"Have you guessed? Do you know?"

"No. How could I?"

"You've hit it. all right."

With the cryptic words, Wall swung around to his desk; he was himself once more, hard as nails. He took up a pen and began to write. Presently he tore a check loose and extended it.

"Here's your hundred thousand, with a rough guess at the interest to date," he said. Hardesty was almost too amazed to take the check. "I never meant to pay a penny for it," Wall went on. "You and your blasted lawyers couldn't make me pay, either. Something else has. Don't ask me what; I don't know. I tell you, something's going to happen! And it's not what I've been afraid of in my heart, either."

A short laugh came from him. He lit a cigarette and leaned back.

"You wondered why I made Gore stay as a house guest, when apparently there's no special reason for it? Well, I saw something in his face, in his eyes, perhaps in his heart. . . . I want him here where I know what he's about."

Hardesty frowned. "You can't mean you're afraid of him?" he asked incredulously.

"No," Wall puffed at his cigarette reflectively. "You know, Hardesty, the Greeks are a proud people; particularly those of the better class, like General Koulis, who has numerous relatives. I've heard, definitely, that they've taken a family oath to wipe out what they consider a stain on the family honor, with blood. The fools! How little they know of it! I've been afraid of a knife or a bullet for some time now."

He pressed his hand over his eyes again, and laid down his cigarette.

"D'you mind if I lie down until dinner?" he went on. "I'll take some more aspirin and get rid of this ache. We'll talk later; I'm not up to it now, that's a fact. I still think something's going to happen. I looked at the barometer, but it's not down. No storm. Must be something else. Miss Negli, by the way, said she'd be in the library."

Hardesty went downstairs with the uneasy conviction biting at him that somehow John Wall was reeling and staggering under unseen buffetings and trying desperately to maintain his balance. When he found Stella Negli in the library, he said as much to her.

"I don't pretend to understand it, but that's the impression he conveys," he went on. "And what's more, he let loose of himself for a minute or two. He's not hard, not hard at all! That's a protective shell he's built up. I wouldn't be a bit astonished to find that he's the direct opposite of what everyone supposes! Sentimental, romantic, perhaps even a man of singularly high ideals. . . . But you must think this is all nonsense. It's just a mental flash I seemed to get from him. May be entirely wrong."

"Not in the least," she replied softly, her eyes warm. "Do you know, Jim, you have a marvelous way of making people like you and trust you?"

"What d'you mean? You don't seem surprised by what I say."

"I'm not. It's all true, and more. I'm only surprised that you should have hit upon the truth about him without knowing more than you do."

He frowned at her. "But how do you know so much? You don't know him any better than I do, nor as well."

"I've been talking with Zoe Koulis, though. Rather, she's been talking to me, opening her heart to me. Jim, we've stumbled upon something very beautiful and wonderful in this house. Not what we expected."

"Wouldn't be the first time Cavendeen gave me the wrong steer. But I don't get it. She's knocked out because her child's dead. Yet she could turn her back on that child without a thought and run away with him—"

She checked him. "Not without a thought; far from it! Why, Jim, you should be able to see and understand it—you, of all people!"

He recollected Wall's words: "Her soul with the child, her heart and life with me."

"Mind, I'm not saying it's right or moral or anything of the sort," she went on. "But it is something very fine and beautiful. They love each other so truly, so tenderly, that when they found each other she could even give up the child to go with him. She was brave enough to face the world, because of him. And he, too, gave up much; as you say, there are unexpected depths in him. Think how his own life and political ambitions must have been ruined, in a sense, by this love-affair!"

Hardesty looked into her eyes. "You seem to admire him—both of them."

"I admire that quality in them, at least."

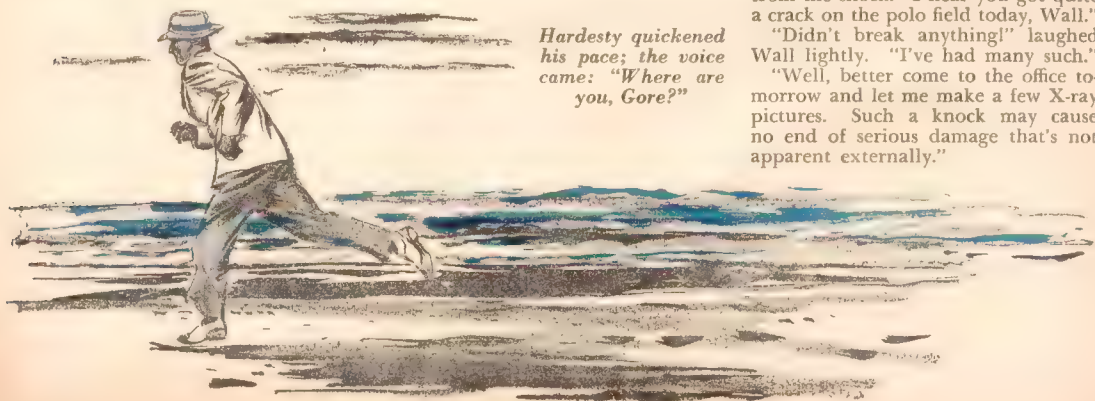
"Then take the lesson to heart," he shot out. "You refuse even to let me speak of love, although you know we love each other. You're silly enough to let some tiny strain of Chinese heredity stand between us—as though you're not the most exquisitely beautiful thing that God ever made! If you were yellow as saffron, or blue or purple or green, I'd love you just as much! Simply because you've lived in China and have been impressed by the way some cockeyed fools talk about Eurasian girls, you'd let both of us miss all the real and the true in life! Well, you're not going to do it!"

Her eyes startled, her cheeks white, she listened to his outburst. She could make no reply, for now Gore appeared, coming to join them. She turned, and Hardesty introduced the Canadian; the moment was over.

COCKTAILS came; Wall appeared, looking greatly refreshed; then the four dined on the terrace overlooking beach and sea. The doctor had come again and was checking up on Mrs. Koulis. He came to the table and accepted a cup of coffee.

"She's asleep," he said. "And she'll sleep until morning; I've given her something. She asked that you remain, Miss Negli; I told her you would. I think she's past all danger from the shock. I hear you got quite a crack on the polo field today, Wall." "Didn't break anything!" laughed Wall lightly. "I've had many such."

"Well, better come to the office tomorrow and let me make a few X-ray pictures. Such a knock may cause no end of serious damage that's not apparent externally."



Hardesty quickened his pace; the voice came: "Where are you, Gore?"

The doctor departed. The dinner was finished, the table was removed; they sat smoking on the darkened terrace, watching the stars come out over the sea and the phosphorescent surf curling along the beach below.

The stars and the night and the murmurous waves blanked out the world and drew thoughts into words that must have gone unuttered by daylight. For Gore's benefit, Wall told of the radiogram that had arrived this afternoon. His wife, as he termed her, as perhaps he thought of her, had not seen the child for the past four years. Gore made some tactful comment; he probably knew of the unconventional situation.

"I'm afraid for her!" said Wall abruptly. "Damn it, there's nothing I can say—nothing anyone can say!"

"You're mistaken." Stella Negli's voice floated softly from the darkness. "It has been said. I told her about the poem of Ng Li—you know it, Jim. The poem about the loved one who died and sent back the word to her beloved, and its refrain: *'Birds all fly one way in a wind, and we shall not long be separated. Eight are the gates, and I shall set my heart at each, until you come.'* She liked it, she appreciated it, and I think it helped her." "Gad!" said Wall under his breath.

"Say that again, will you?"

She complied. Gore spoke up; his voice sounded harsh and grim.

"Empty, silly words! How could they help her or anyone?"

"From those who have no inner beauty, the beautiful is hidden," said Stella Negli. It was an uncompromising rebuke. She rose. "No, don't get up. I'm going to read myself to sleep, if you don't mind. Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

She was gone. In passing, her fingers brushed Hardesty's cheek—a farewell, a warning? The touch sent an impulse through him like a drum-beat. She must have sensed something amiss.

"Sorry. Apparently I said the wrong thing," Gore observed, and again his voice seemed to clash with the peaceful quiet of the night.

John Wall came to his feet.

"Tide's going out and the wet sand makes firm walking. How about a stroll up the beach?"

"I think I'll run along, if you don't mind," said Hardesty, rising.

"So early? I'm sorry; but if you must, you must. I'll get the car out and see you off. Back in a moment, Gore. Then we'll take to the beach and walk off dinner, eh?"

They passed through the house together. At a wall phone by the entrance, evidently connecting with the garage, Wall pressed a button, took off the receiver, and told his chauffeur to get out the car. Hardesty turned to him.

"About that check: I haven't said—"

"Say nothing." Wall took his arm, intimately, and they went outside. "I don't savvy it either; something's wrong in me, somewhere. I'm not myself. Perhaps I'm just trying to buy off a pack of devils; I've got frantic impulses to do no end of queer things—call it nerves and be done with it! Here's the car. . . . I'll get in touch with you tomorrow. Good-night, and sleep hearty!"

Hardesty got into the car. It was as though unseen hands were holding him back; he had the sense of doing something wrong. There was a drum-beat in his cheek again, where her fingers had touched him. He had an urge to go back, go back! Angrily, he crushed it down; no sense to it, he told himself.

His hand brushed littered papers on the seat. He snapped on the overhead light; letters and telegrams, unopened.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

The black chauffeur turned, glanced.

"Mr. Wall done fo'got his mail, sho did! We picked it up in town, suh, and—"

"Turn around and take me back," said Hardesty impulsively. "I'll take it to him. Something else I want to see him about, anyway."

The car swung and turned back. Hardesty bit his lip. A foolish, silly thing to do! But the letters gave him an excuse. And at worst, he felt Wall would comprehend his unreasoned urge. In these past few hours, the man had changed appreciably. He must have been badly frightened by the state of Zoe Koulis; this, perhaps, had broken down the hard, cynical shell enclosing his real personality. . . .

They were before the house entrance again. Hardesty rang, and the butler came to the door, swinging it wide at sight of him.

"I came back with a lot of mail that was in the car, forgotten," said Hardesty. "I'll take it to Mr. Wall. . . . He's on the terrace still?"

"I think he and Mr. Gore went to the beach, sir. He often walks on the beach when the tide's out, of an evening."

Hardesty passed through the house, keeping the mail to explain his return; he felt suddenly embarrassed about it, now. The senseless urge to come back was undoubtedly silly.

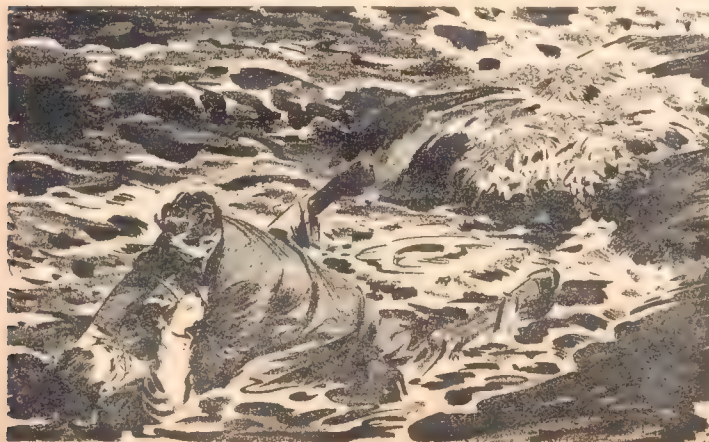
The terrace was deserted. He went on down the steps to the beach. The starlight was guide enough. To one side, boathouses and inlet blocked the way; they would have turned in the other direction. He turned likewise. They would not be far, probably not beyond the limit of Wall's grounds.

IN the starlight, the wet dark beach was wide; the tide was bearing out strongly. The long surf filled the night with formless sound and pale luminous streaks; the dry white rise of the upper beach was like snow. Rustling palms closed out the shores and the whole world was here compassed between stars and sea, with something pulsing across it—a sound so filled with panic and horror that Hardesty's scalp prickled even before he knew what it was.

Then he recognized it as a voice, indistinct, murmurous, and he quickened pace. The wet sand ahead was empty, however; the voice came from the rise of white dry sand to one side. The words began to reach him.

"Where are you, Gore? Why don't you give me a hand? I knew something frightful was coming—I didn't imagine anything as horrible as this. . . . It can't be true, it can't! God, don't let it be true! Stop it, stop it! If you mean to punish me, do it in some other way!"

The words became gasps, inarticulate. Hardesty turned aside; water was ahead, an inlet where the sea still reached into a little cove. The voice came from there. It was the voice of John Wall. Now it sounded anew:



"Why don't you answer me, Gore? This is awful; it's beyond conception—and to hit me, of all people! Me! What have I done, to deserve this? I knew something was coming on, but I didn't dream of this. Where are you, Gore?"

Hardesty stopped dead, as Gore's voice reached him.

"Gore isn't here any more, John Wall. He fooled you neatly, didn't he? You even thought there was something in his face to remind you of other days. . . . And you were right. But you can't look at me now, John Wall, or you'd know me again. Here I am, within six feet of you. Agathon Koulis. . . . You remember the name, do you? You remember the cousin of the soldier whom you wronged so deeply? I was his aide in those days, but also his cousin. Reach out and touch me, John Wall! Touch me, grapple with me, find me if you can! But you're blind now, blind. . . . I don't need to worry about how to trap you. You're trapped for me, and you can't get away from me—"

A laugh of mockery, plunging footsteps, a gasp, a thudding fall.

"Pick yourself up," said Gore. "Blinded fool that you are! I'll strike you harder next time—harder every time, until you can't rise again. Then you'll float away with the tide, out to the sharks who wait beyond the kelp. And there'll be no mark, in case you don't reach them. They'll say that John Wall became blind from that crack he got at polo, and swam out to kill himself. . . . But you'll know better, Wall!"

Hardesty awakened from his paralysis of comprehension. Vague shapes rose ahead; he strained to see more clearly in the starlit darkness. The thing Wall feared had caught up with him: Gore, the Canadian, was Agathon Koulis, a Greek. And something else had caught up with him! . . . That was his figure, blinded, staggering, lurching vainly to get at the man who taunted him.

Another thudding blow. Wall put both hands to his face; a groan escaped him.

"So that's it! Then in God's name kill me and do it quickly!"

"Not much!" Koulis laughed again. "You'll die in the water, John Wall; your lungs will be filled with it, if the sharks spare you. This slungshot won't kill you. The tide will bear you out—"

A torrent of savage oaths burst from Wall. He moved swiftly, but the other man avoided his blind rush and reaching hands. Koulis stepped in at him from the side, swung the slungshot he held, and Wall staggered anew under the blow.

"Think about the woman you stole from her husband and her home!" lifted the voice of Koulis, cold and im-

placable. "Think about the dishonor, about the injury done a brave man—"

Hardesty searched vainly. The sands were bare of stick or stone or weapon of any kind. Another groan from Wall, and he gave up the frantic search. He strode forward openly.

"That's enough of this nonsense!" he snapped out. "Gore, or whoever you are, clear out before I put the police on you! It's all right, Mr. Wall—this fellow won't bother you further.

The eighth and concluding story of this much-discussed series will appear in our forthcoming May issue. Like the others, it tells of an exciting adventure that befalls Jim Hardesty when he picks up the pieces in America of a great business wrecked by the Japanese bombings of Chungking.

Glad I came along in time. On your way, Gore! Clear out."

A cry of recognition and joy burst from John Wall. It ended in a gasp and a groan and a fall; Koulis, arm swinging, rushed on him with a blow that felled him and then continued his rush straight at Hardesty.

His silence, his lack of oaths or threats, his quick, determined ferocity, were grimly eloquent. Here the soft dry sand was ankle-deep. Hardesty tried to avoid the rush and the flailing weapon. His foot slid with the sand and he came to one knee. Thanks to his fall, the slungshot missed full force but struck him in the back of the head.

He sprawled, face in sand, a shower of sparks starting his brain. Frantically he threw himself sideways and came to one knee. Another blow, glancing, took him on the cheek and he felt the blood spring warm. He was aware of John Wall crying out something at him. A vicious backhand slap of the slungshot, and his right eye became a ball of fire.

He leaped frenziedly, maddened by the pain—leaped in at Koulis and grappled him. The Greek slugged him mercilessly with the weapon. Hardesty fought, but his blows seemed to have no effect. He was no good in such a scramble as this. He felt a slice of stabbing pain. His head cleared, and angry terror seized him. In his free hand, Koulis had a knife and was slashing with it.

Instead of recoiling, Hardesty flung forward, grappled afresh, got a grip, and tried to bring down the man. They were on the wet sand, water swirled about their feet. Hardesty had the knife-wrist fast, but the slungshot smashed him again in the face. The Greek was snarling like a mad dog now. Abruptly, Hardesty back-heeled him, flung weight upon him, and they went headlong together, Kou-

lis undermost, with a great splash of water.

But in the fall Hardesty lost his grip on the man's wrist. He was in deadly fear of that knife. He bore the other down and down; they rolled over in the shallow water, and over again, Koulis fighting for supremacy and for air, Hardesty trying furiously to pin the knife-wrist again. A wave swirled around them and bore them out a little into deeper water. Pain ripped across Hardesty's chest. . . . He thought he was stabbed in this instant, then found the wrist he sought and fastened upon it with one hand, the other desperately sinking into the Greek's throat. The throat seemed to give way abruptly, his fingers sank deeper; water burst over him as a breaker sucked at them and tore them apart and sundered them.

Scrambling against the suck of water, Hardesty found footing and staggered up on the sand. Battered, cut, exhausted, he dropped there and lay quiet, until he was aware of Wall's hands tugging at him. He sat up, then gained his feet painfully.

"Where is he?" Wall was saying.

"Koulis—where is he?"

"Lord!" Hardesty looked out at the starlit water. "I guess he's gone out to sea. . . . I can't do anything about it. I'm all in. He had a knife—I thought I was stabbed, but it looks like a slash across the chest, no more. Let him go. . . . We'll have to face the music."

"There's worse than that to face," said Wall. "Hello, what's this on your cheek? Blood? And you're cut, you say? . . . Come along! Take my arm. We'll get back to the house. You'll have to steer me. Yes, this is self-defense, but there's worse. . . . All of life a blind man, do you understand?"

"Maybe not." Hardesty collected himself, pumping air into his lungs. "And even if that's so, Wall, you don't need any eyes. I'd trade places with you in a minute, if I had Stella Negli waiting at that house for me. . . . Yes, by God! Right now I've got one eye that feels like a melon; can't open it. And I'd give 'em both like a shot—and glad of the chance, if I knew she was there waiting for me, like that woman is for you!"

HE felt John Wall draw a deep breath; then the man's arm came about his wet shoulders.

"Damned if I don't think you mean it, Hardesty! That's something to think about; true as gospel, too! You won't hear me do any more whimpering. Come on, step out! . . . What we need is to find a doctor! Yes, you're right about it. The body be damned! It's not me that's blinded, not me at all—just these eyes!"

And he actually laughed, deeply and joyously, as they fell into step.



A novelette based on an American naval battle off Hawaii—in 1813.

by JACLAND MARMUR



IN the robust northern latitudes where the ships of the Salem whalemens homed, dawn at this time of year would march boldly out of Massachusetts Bay, crystal cold and blustering with autumn's threat. There would be early frost on Winter Island and the bronze fore-castle bells at Salem Quay would tongue with singular clarity, double-stroked sea music from a spar-branched forest of masts rooting along the foreshore because of the frigates of British blockade. But here in the islands of the Great South Sea where the warm, wet trade wind blew, the sun was a sudden shell-burst hurling spears of light against the rocky shield of Makapuu Head.

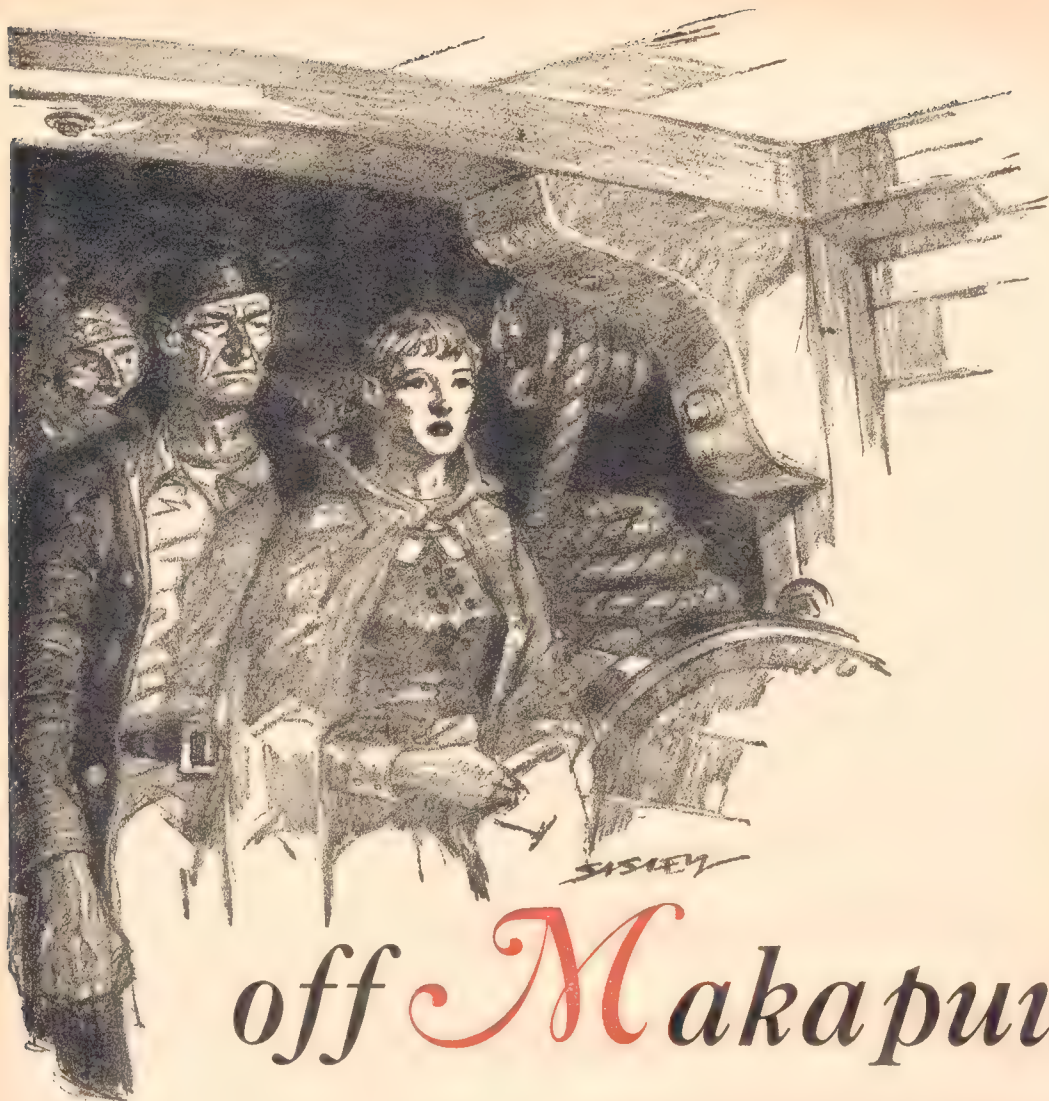
All night the red eye of a signal-fire from the land winked into velvet darkness. But its power, like the brilliant constellations high aloft, ended with the dawn. It, too, waned and seemed to expire before approaching day. The man who sat humped on the beach stirred his huge shoulders and stood up, his shadow immense behind him in the first dawn light. For some moments he remained very still, looking down at the young woman asleep beside the fire, wrapped in a blue sea-cape, her head pillowed in its hood, a small, lead-bound sea chest shielding her a little from the damp night air. An odd light was in his deep-pocketed eyes, something of reverence, something of awe. Cherokee Sam, his old brown face wrinkled as a Massachusetts winter apple, master harpooner of the Barton whaling fleet, did simple homage thus to the troubling mystery of womanhood he had never quite been able to solve in the way of his rough and often lewdly brutal life. For an instant it was almost tenderness that touched his weather-bitten face, a most singular thing for a powerful man with a lion's mane of gray hair bunching beneath a stocking cap, the marks of fifty sea years plain upon him.

Gunfire

And it puzzled him with a vague annoyance he could not give a name. Like the wild exultation he had known some thirty years before when the Colonies went free by what wounds men like himself were stoically willing to take. That, too, had been a puzzling thing. And here was English war again and the Salem whaling fleet in threat. The old seaman frowned and turned away.

"Old man!" he put a grumbling complaint to himself. "Puzzling is a no good thing. Only the whales you waif can fetch home any ile!"

He set chaff coffee to boil over a pocket of embers, his big red paws clumsily methodical about such unfamiliar work. From behind the volcanic boulder he had used as a back rest, he brought coconuts, a few plantain. In the distant brush two small, tethered burros grazed, making a rustling noise at forage. If the ships failed the rendezvous, he reflected, the animals would be needed to return to the village of Honolulu from this headland of the Island of Owheehee. Satisfied they were all right, he turned his weathered face to the sea, searching against blinding light.



off *Makapuu*

He saw the trade clouds piled in tumbling heights in the north, their upper peaks somber yet with darkness, their lower ridges edged with flame. Southward, the coral reef sent long combers foaming with unhurried speed, lifting spray to the morning sky. In between the ocean stirred and vastly sighed till it reached the beach, where it sent questing little fingers of white water on exploration between the lava rocks. But there was no sail in sight.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the girl stir in sleep. His ingenuous sense of propriety had apparently been on guard against this, for he seized his spyglass at once and, with his limping gait, he hurried out of sight around a jutting crag. When he came back, she was waiting for him, a slender, long-legged young woman in a tight-bodied New England dress that molded her bosom in youthful maturity; and the sunlight was golden on her yellow hair.

"Cherokee!" she admonished sternly. "The morning watch was mine."

"I felt no need for sleep, Miss Barton," he growled; and he telescoped his glass with exaggerated carelessness.

"Miss Barton!" she mimicked, putting her arms akimbo. Then she dropped gracefully to her heels by the fire, pouring steaming coffee into pannikins. With faint amusement in her clear gray eyes, she said: "It was always 'Naomi' in my father's ship."

"Aye." His big head nodded gravely. "But it is not fitten here."

"Oh-h." She pursed her small mouth, then let a short tinkling laugh escape her lips. She mocked, almost with gayety: "You are fearful people will gossip?"

Cherokee Sam swallowed coffee, stirring his shoulders in embarrassment. "I have a place," was all the explanation he could make. Then he flatly announced: "We should not be here together at all."

"Why, that is Philadelphia nonsense! Davis says he hears of an English frigate sent to cruise the southern sea. Ike Davis is personal adviser to the great King Kamehameha and—"

"I take no stock in British men-o'-war ten thousand leagues from home. But if it should be true, the more

reason for you to remain safely in Honolulu, and not be wanting to rejoin the whaler *Naomi Barton* and be running into gunfire. It would be your father's wish."

"You are too fearful, Cherokee. The fleet will rendezvous off Makapuu. We will have my brother's brig privateer for convoy, and the twenty-four-gun ship *Alert* besides. Between those two they can set the tune for any clumsy English frigate, very handily."

"Clumsy?" The old harpooner brought the crags of his brows together. "I have had to do with them before," he growled. "They have a guileless, simple look, these Englishmen. Here, a man would think, is an easy enemy. And then suddenly the iron sings! Napoleon himself is discovering—"

"The more reason, then, to burn a signal-fire here! There is sea room outside for a ship to choose her action space if there is need. Should they be caught at anchor in the harbor when a man-o'-war takes up blockade— If what we hear of what happened inside the Chesapeake is true, they are as handy as any Yankee crew at cutting out! No. We will keep our ships out of Kaiwi Channel with our warning if we can and sail from here together in convoy eastward round the Horn. And I will be in the barque my father named for me." She tossed her head. "She will be flying the full-ship pennant, too, when Luke Goodson brings her booming in from the whaling-grounds along the Line!"

"Aye. No doubt. She is a lucky ship, that one, luckiest of all the Barton fleet your father built and sailed. He—"

CHEROKEE SAM'S voice hesitated, then ceased altogether. For some moments there was silence while the creeping tide sucked and gurgled with a louder sound and the surf drummed distantly. Cherokee had seen this woman grow from awkward, gangling girlhood to young maturity on the decks of the Barton ships. She grew straight and tall, and that look of eager wonder came early to her eyes, the look the strong young have of expecting sure and splendid conquest beyond the pale horizon line. It gave her Northern loveliness a sense of smoldering fire and passion the old harpooner found it difficult to understand. It was the Salem heritage, no doubt, because it seemed to him her father had had that same sturdy look until the end. It made you remember the clean prospect of New England seaport towns in the walking winter mists; it made you remember the virile foreshore sounds; and it made you know these things were good. John Barton was gone now. It was four months since the barque sheeted home her topsails out of Honolulu Bay, leaving Cherokee Sam and Naomi ashore to care for the stern old man who needed no better protection against his age and fever than the familiar yellow muffler round his throat.

"Watch her good, Luke," he told his mate before he took his gaunt frame ashore; and, "Watch her good, Sam," he told his friend, the old harpooner, just before he closed his eyes. These had always been John Barton's deep concern—his ships and his girl. And these were strong recollections in the eyes of Cherokee Sam as he blinked against the sunfire of the Great South Sea. But when he spoke, it was of a different thing.

"It is not well," he grumbled in his chest, "to underestimate an enemy. They are a stubborn lot and proud as Lucifer, the men from the Narrow Sea. They keep a mad king safely hid and out of harm. No one speaks of it, because it is not fit. Lord Liverpool makes believe his Prince Regent never took the marriage vows with the papist Lady Fitzherbert while he makes sweet speech to the Princess Caroline. And no one speaks of that, either. So a foolish man might think the English folk are surely in the mire at last. Ho! The English folk survive their kings with ease. And when the need shapes up—the iron sings again! But I do not love them. No! I have some wounds to remember. Out of the Indian wars, and out of British boarding-pikes back in '81." The old harpooner's voice

went flat, the tassel of his stocking cap rapping his cheek in emphasis. "I was twice impressed from Western Ocean ships," he snarled, "and I served brass guns that were not mine off Tripoli and off Cadiz! No!" he boomed. "I do not love the English! When I haul on breaching tackles, let it be beneath an ensign full of stars! The red St. George's cross is not for—" He caught himself up. The savagery went out of his fierce blue eyes. "I am sorry, Naomi," he said with grave humility, "I had forgotten—" "Well,"—she smiled,—"so it is Naomi again at last!"

"Aye. I had forgotten all about your Lieutenant Wainright." He grinned contritely. "He is man enough to be of Yankee breed, that one—"

"But he is not!" the girl interrupted quickly. "He is an English naval officer." She looked away, dismissing the thing. "The ships are overdue, Cherokee. They must not miss our signal when they make landfall here on Makapuu."

"You are fond of him," the old sailor persisted.

"Fond?" She continued to stare off against the empty ocean space, purple water ringed with cloud, the trade wind keen against her cheek. "Fond? How silly words can sound! We did not use such words, sailing a ship's yawl on Salem Bay and the weather in the east, or when we danced together in Jamaica and the King's band played before the war. It seems to me we used no words at all, because I can remember none of them. We laughed very much; that I do remember. We did not seem to be enemies. We laughed so much I cannot tell you if his eyes are blue or gray. But they can be fierce. They are North Country eyes. Like yours. I remember, too, that Father said he had an uncouth way of dancing, holding a girl too close. I think Father was right. The braid of his uniform could hurt." Her hand thoughtlessly touched her breast. "It hurts a little yet." Then she tossed her head to dismiss a thing she had never really intended to say. But when she turned to look at him, there was no shame on her at all. "You now, Cherokee! Did you never one day see a girl, and the two of you walk straightway toward each other as if you both knew all at once—" She laughed that sudden, tinkling laugh. "No. Of course not. Not tough old Cherokee Sam Slade!"

He looked at her for an odd moment of silence. Then: "No," he murmured gravely; and he stood up, picking his spyglass from the rock. "I will climb the crag a piece to see if whales still spout. Or perhaps a Yankee sail."

The old seaman climbed with precision, dragging his shorter leg a little and heaving his solid frame from one foothold to the other. She watched him reach a shelf of the promontory, where he drew himself erect to face the east. Here he rested his glass to study blinding outer emptiness with faithful care, the sunshine on the polished leather of his cheek. Then she walked to the water's edge where the trade wind tightly molded the dress to her body, buffeting her skirts. And with the green jungle at her back the girl, too, peered outward toward the sea.

THEY kept that watch all day. The girl was fretful with eagerness, pacing the shale to and fro—for she was young and the young can waste no time awaiting an award. But Cherokee Sam had the long patience of those who know defeat and have learned at last how to stare it down boldly. The sunfire passed from the seaward face of Makapuu, dragging shadow slowly after it across the cliff. The eastward slopes of Owheehee lost their burning look as the sun went west. And it was late afternoon when the old harpooner steadied his glass on a point in the south and east. The girl sensed quick concentration in his posture. She came to stand below him, motionless and expectant, her small round face upraised.

"The Salem ships!"

He said nothing for some moments, his big red hand adjusting the focus screw. Then he growled out observation in terse, broken bits: "Three t'gallants. . . . Broad

sparred. The *Alert* would have a cleaner cut. I can see no more. Now she lifts! No; she is not Salem-built. She comes up from the South. Starb'd tack. Wallowing her yards." He stopped. The girl remained unstirring. "Hull up," said Cherokee at last. Then all at once he snapped shut his telescope, climbing quickly down to stand before her on the beach and growl a single word: "English!"

The girl exclaimed: "Davis was right, then! Cherokee, if this frigate—"

"Frigate? She moves more like a barge-boat in the Thames."

"Well, then!" Quick excitement gleamed in Naomi Barton's sea-gray eyes, and her cheeks took fire. "A prize! A prize, Cherokee, for Leclerc's privateer *Alert* or for my brother Ira's brig the *Yankee Blade*, if only one of them will lift the land in time! Give me the glass, old bear." She plucked it from him, spun round, and swept the southern quarter where the sea ran blue and white. "Ah! She shows her courses." The girl's low contralto was rich, a little throaty. "Heavy tops, rope railed. Gilt on her quarter galleries, and a beak bow square as a Dutch go-down."

"Indiaman!"

"No doubt of it."

The old harpooner frowned. "Why does an Honorable Company ship run westward round Cape Horn instead—"

"Because Isaac Hull and Davy Porter are hunting British ducks in the Yankee frigates off Cape Hope!" She swung her glass slowly in a northing arc, breathing eager excitement. "Leclerc, Leclerc!" she pleaded. "Here is prize money enough for your fat Nantucket wife and all the seven babes, with no more worry for the winter pork if you only pry the horizon mist apart in time! Here—"

Her voice cut off, and the glass trembled a little in the balance of her small white hand. "The *Alert*! Cherokee! She swings three royals in the sky. She has the weather gauge and running free. Look there!" The glass came from her eye; she thrust it seaward like a lunging sword. "See her walking down the wind!"

Cherokee moved his head. In the north and east three pale gray banners swung, like little clouds in unison. His puckered sailor eyes could read the signs they spoke. The twenty-four-gun Yankee privateer *Alert* thrust her lower canvas upward like some wild and urgent growth reaching to heaven swiftly from the sea. Then her lean, dark hull ran free. The hot sun, dipping westward, hurled red bolts against her till, with heavy trade clouds solid-banked astern, her canvas glowed like three red pyramids of fire. White foam marched before her eyes as she came racing for the land, but Cherokee looked that way for only a moment.

"I do not like this thing," he growled, fastening his stare on the lumbering Indiaman. "She has—"

"He says he does not like it!" Naomi's voice rang quick and short with glee. "Cherokee, you are a most melancholy man! See now—Captain Leclerc has sighted prey! He hauls his wind to shut her off from sea room. I can see his gunports open and the muzzles glitter black. Presently we—"

"The Englishman means to run east. Foolish man! He tacks slowly. And yet—"

"All Englishmen tack slowly, Cherokee. A change of course is irreligious to a Britisher."

"She moves with a sluggish air," the old harpooner growled, "like a ship with her bottom foul. Yet she wears huge t'gan's'ls and the wind is fresh. And that white sheer line of her, broad from the mizzen channels to her bows. It is an odd strake for a ship of Honorable John to sport." He rumbled on, his instincts alert and fretful: "Two fo'c'stle guns at side, two at the quarter-deck. Probably carronades. . . . Ah! She almost missed her stays! How odd that—"

"Stop mumbling, Cherokee! Honorable John has eight guns, ten at most; and those meant only for close defense against Malay pirate praus. The *Alert* is a twenty-four-gun



High aloft, above the clouds of powder-smoke, the foretruck of the privateer was describing a crazy arc.



"Such a clever trick to murder Salem men, Lieutenant Wainright!"

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

privateer and fast as a hawk at wing. The Salem whalers must be close behind her, and no doubt my brother's brig. The ships will make the rendezvous in spite of all your grumbling. But first there is this ugly duck to pick. A pity Ira's *Yankee Blade* is not—" She broke off, her voice keening with excitement. "Leclerc's bow chaser talks!"

The action was in plain sight now to the watchers on the shore. The sun dipped to the burning peaks of Owheehee, setting shadows of the hills darkly marching out upon the sea. On the eastern board the tumbling trade clouds went afire with sunset light, aflame from the zenith to the ocean floor. But in between, where the last great pool of daylight still flooded the sea off Makapu, the two ships stood etched in brilliant clarity. A small white cloud blossomed at the eyes of the running *Alert*; an instant later the single crash of gunfire came slamming to the land. The shot fell far short, sending a jet of spray aloft from where it dropped. The Indianman held on, the gilt of her stern and quarter galleries aflame with sunfire. The *Alert* hauled farther to the east to head her off from open sea, leaning now so her gunports bristled and her copper sheathing flashed. The Yankee ensign whipped aloft to her mizzen peak as she rushed down with all sail set, eating up the sea space left between. Suddenly the Indianman sent her canvas shuddering in stays again. She came through the wind's eye more quickly this time. On the starboard tack once more she plunged her beak bow deep, worrying closer to the land.

"Too late!" Naomi Barton's rich contralto sang, guessing the intention of the Englishman's maneuver. Her eyes burned brightly and her little fists were clenched. "You should have run for Kaiwi Channel from the start. Not now! Now you are—"

"She tacked with ease that time," growled Cherokee Sam Slade. "Now why—"

"You grumble like an old woman at her worrying. Watch how Leclerc will tuck her in his bag!"

The *Alert* stood up with her compensating change of course, the towers of her sun-drenched canvas dwarfing the narrow hull beneath. White smoke belched from her head once more, swallowing the crimson tongue of flame her bow gun spat. The explosion rocked against the cliffs and the solid shot geysered in the sea squarely across the wall-sided bows of the Indianman.

"He takes notice this time!" Naomi Barton cried. "He slings t'gallants in the gear!"

The old harpooner made no response. His wrinkled face was set in an intense frown as he watched the Indianman lay her mainsail to her mast in obedience to the signal to heave to, wallowing in the long deep swell. The *Alert* rushed down, standing closer inshore. Men were visible on her deck now, and far aft Jack Leclerc, tall beside the wheel. These things were plainly to be seen while the shadow of the land raggedly marched across the sea to touch the ships at war.

"She has showed no colors yet. She has not struck." Old Cherokee growled this out from deep in his chest, his eyes narrow against the last reflected light. "Leclerc! Leclerc!" he pleaded, remembering Cadiz and Tripoli and the waters off the Chesapeake. "Put yourself under his counter. Shorten down. You are too reckless, standing in bow on to be raked by slaughtering carronades. You—"

He said no more. A startled gasp escaped the girl. And then those two, side by side in half light on the beach, were silent with horror. What happened came swiftly, while shadow gathered deeper in the mist-hung, purple valleys of the land. All in an instant the white ensign of England with the red St. George's cross slapped to the Indianman's mizzen peak, the battle flags stiff in the wind from her lofty trucks. The broad white sheer lines running from her after chain plates to her bows fell as if by magic from her hull, broad, painted false strokes of wood, held in place by lashings. They dropped from both her sides to splash into the sea, drifting clear. Lifting gunports were revealed instead, then the maws of the guns themselves, thrusting out. What

had appeared a lumbering, helpless Eastern Island merchantman showed for what she really was, a razed forty-four-gun King's ship, H.M.S. *Resolve*. And then the broadside thundered, almost at point-blank range.

The violent explosions rocked with a solid crash, one single mighty roar. This was no ragged broadside manned by merchant gunners, but the deadly work of well and long trained naval crews. The heavy carronades fore and aft followed almost instantly, orange fire licking through the heavy battle smoke, grape and canister pouring raking fire across the *Alert's* rashly exposed deck, doing frightful execution. The deception had been perfect, the surprise overwhelming; the purpose of the Indianman's seemingly foolish maneuver was apparent now. Three of the *Alert's* forward pieces went off, singly, setting up new thunderous echoes to reverberate from the face of the seaward cliffs. Disastrously, she could bring no more to bear.

GRAY-YELLOW powder-smoke engulfed the embattled ships like a sinister fog bank hanging low upon the wine-dark sea. Above it only upper spars were visible, musket-fire rattling from the Englishman's fighting tops. Now she put her canvas all aback, making sternway and yawing to let the *Alert*, with strong way still upon her, sharply overrun. It brought the razed frigate's larboard broadside quickly into range, first the forward ordnance slamming out destruction, then each after heavy piece along the gun deck as it came to bear. Now the effect of that first overwhelming hail of solid shot was plain. High aloft, above the clouds of stinking power-smoke, the fore-truck of the Yankee privateer was describing a little crazy arc. The royal canvas swayed with it, drunkenly careening in the sky. Then the whole mast rolled slowly down like a falling tree, torn cordage spilling with it. The main-mast followed, the snapping stays exploding like pistol shots, dragging the mizzen royal and topgallant with it in a tangled mass of wreckage.

With the smoke pall hanging, shielding her hull from sight, it seemed the *Alert* had disintegrated utterly. Till the trade wind, coming fresh with falling night, tattered that smoke to ribbons. And the horrified watchers on the shore could see her, what had such a little time before been a tall-sparred ship with life and power in her. She was a dismantled hulk now, black specks inert upon her deck. She wallowed, helpless and defenseless, the wreckage dragging from her wounded hull—the English frigate, hardly scratched, wearing round in the north to bear down for the kill. Naomi Barton dropped her chin upon her chest and let a long hard sob come rackingly from her breast. She remained that way, hollow and empty of emotion. But the old harpooner, who had seen wars and devastations many times before, stood stiff and motionless, his face a stony mask of agony; and he could keep his hollow eyes on this disaster too.

He saw the final explosion rend apart what was left of the deck of the Yankee privateer *Alert*. It belched upward in a mighty, roaring sheet of flame, wreckage spewing, charred timbers flying heavenward.

The girl's head came up. "Cherokee," she sobbed, "Lercier's Nantucket wife will have no—"

"He blew up the magazine." The seaman's voice was hoarse. "He sent overside what men were left and he blew her up to keep her powder and supply from the enemy. He did not strike." And Cherokee repeated, with a stubborn pride: "He did not strike!"

The charred corpse of the Salem privateer vanished quickly beneath the sea. There was nothing left now but survivors, clinging to some floating spars in failing light. That and the wall-sided frigate lumbering down, rigging boat whips to her yardarms to pick up her false sheer strakes and what men were still alive. Heat-lightning flashed silently across the eastern sky. The twilight deepened. The first phase of the Salem whale-fleet action off the Head of Makapu was at its bitter end and those two who saw it knew

the implications it could hold. Fascinated by the swiftness and horror of the catastrophe, they stood unstirring or the narrow beach of shale and sand, the tall New England girl with yellow hair and the old harpooner, his face square and set like a carving out of solid teak. The trade wind freshened, moaning against the cliff while the surf drummed distantly with a loud and lonely sound.

"Now my brother's brig is all that stands between this disguised man-o'-war and the helpless whaling ships." The girl's voice sounded dull and very far away. "A privateer eighteen against a frigate forty-four!"

"He is a rash and headstrong man, Captain Ira Barton of the *Yankee Blade*." Cherokee Sam Slade kept his wrinkled face against the wind, and he did not move his leonine old head. "He will make the rendezvous and he, too, will think he has an easy English merchant prize to pick. He will be destroyed! After that, this blasted razed Indianman will snap up the Salem ships at will. One by one. Like a bull sperm snapping squid." He raised his forearm; he opened and shut his huge fist in a gesture of sudden violence—once, and again. "Like that!"

"He must be warned." Naomi's voice had still that tone of dullness and of apathy. "Ira must be warned in time."

The old seaman's head snapped round. "Of course!" he barked. "And I stand here whining like—" He went round on his heel, striding robustly with his uneven gait toward the embers of the signal fire. "Quickly, Naomi! We will ride the burros. I will find a sloop, a cutter, anything that floats and sails! With luck I can intercept the *Yankee Blade* and give her warning of this in time to—"

"You would need more than luck." The girl whirled, sudden vitality in her voice once more. "The whaling fleet and Ira's brig cannot be far away under the horizon lip. The frigate already has the sea out there. You would have to beat around past Diamond Head—and do you suppose this Englishman would let a dispatch boat go sailing past beneath his nose? You would need more than luck: you would need a miracle!"

"Then we will pray for one! The burros—"

He stopped short. The girl was hurling faggots on the live coals. For an instant he watched her in astonishment. Little purple flames took hold of the dry wood instantly, licking upward in gathering gloom. Then he sprang forward, shoving her to one side, out of the light of the fire. "Are you mad? You will bring a boatload of marines on us! You—"

"I will give them a beacon for their landing! Because they are already on their way."

HE looked seaward. It was true. He was in time to see the English cutter lifting swiftly along the hump-backed crest of a running swell, darkly limned in sunset on a darker sea. The oars flashed all together, navy style, catching some reflected fire as yet undrained from the ocean hills. In the east heat-lightning still tongued soundlessly, lighting the big Indianman in brief instants of vivid relief where she wallowed with her mainsail laid against the mast, surging her headsails upward one moment, plunging her beak bow deep in the dark flood the next. The boat swept closer with seamanlike precision, the banked oars striking phosphorescent fire from the sea each time they dipped. He could see the muskets stiffly erect on the middle thwarts, the tarred hats, the pigtails of the seamen and marines.

"We must run for it! They would not follow the burros inland. Even if we have been seen we would be taken to be Kanakas. They cannot know who we are, and—"

"We will remain here, Cherokee, and tell them."

She said this with quick short emphasis, turning toward the sea at once. He eyed her narrowly, his mouth agape on a thing he left unsaid. Wild thoughts went plunging through his brain: She was overwrought by what she had lately seen! So Cherokee gauged distances swiftly, his eyes darting toward the tethered burros, then out to the English cutter where the oar banks flashed. If that disguised

frigate closed with *Ira Barton's* brig, the devilish ruse would work again! Who would take a clumsy-looking Indian to be a forty-four-gun King's ship at cruise in the southern sea? The *Yankee Blade* would be destroyed! And all the whaling fleet afterward—unless warning came to her in time. For a single desperate instant Cherokee thought of making the dash himself. But he knew at once he could not leave her here alone.

"Naomi," he pleaded desperately, "run! I will cover you from their musket-fire. Run while—"

She did not stir. The next moment the cutter hailed the land. "Remain where you are, you twos!" a thin, boyish voice cried through dusk. Cherokee Sam Slade groaned. It was too late! The boat grounded skillfully on the narrow beach between the jutting lava rocks. They were trapped. There was no escape now. They would have to bluff it. But time! This precious time was wasted, and there was little time to spare.

"Say nothing, Naomi!" he warned her in a deep, bass growl. "I am your father, a boat chandler of Owheehee, and we are simply fishing here. The action we saw means nothing to us. Remember, Naomi! Nothing at all."

She made no response. She remained stiffly erect against dancing firelight, a tautness on her and her cheeks aflame while the old seaman fished out a tobacco twist, carelessly shaving a pipetul with his knife into his horny palm. But from under his shaggy brows he saw the little midshipman leap spryly ashore, his hand proudly on the hilt of his dirk. He came briskly toward the fire, two musketed marines at his back. The remainder stood by the boat, ankle-deep in tidewash, passing a long narrow box draped with the English ensign from the cutter to the shore. So that was it! Burial party for some officer fallen in the action who had requested it before he died. A ranking flag officer, at that! There was the chaplain with his prayer-book held high and dry as he waded ashore, the lieutenant in the sternsheets following, gold epaulets, dress coat, and all. Cherokee frowned severely at that stern face under the naval hat, an odd thing tugging his memory. But darkness was settling down with the swiftness of the lower latitudes and the lanterns swinging there in seamen's hands just glittered on a narrow, troubled face with smoldering gunpowder eyes. And then the midshipman was snapping in his face to test his young authority.

"Well, by my ears!" he shrilled. "They're not brown men at all! Here, you! What the blasted hell you doin' here watching—"

"Mind your tongue, little English boy!" Old Cherokee raised his head with solemn dignity. "The mark of the beast's still on you."

The youngster flushed, reminded of the white patches on his uniform collar denoting his lowly rank. "Yankee, eh?" He recovered his dignity with effort. "I'll warrant you've felt a rope's end in a King's ship once or twice." He turned his head. "An old man, sir!" he called back to his officer. "Yankee, by his insolence. And a girl."

"A girl?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Very good, Mr. Vandershort. I am coming."

NAOMI'S head lifted at sound of that quiet voice. She stepped forward, a low gasp in her throat. And then she stopped short. The knife in Cherokee's hand ceased its deliberate movements. It remained poised in one fist, his tobacco twist motionless in the other. Across an open space those two faced each other in utter silence, the Salem girl with the hood of her sea-cape on her shoulders, firelight on her cheek—and the English naval lieutenant, leanly erect in the shadowy fringe where light and darkness merged. For that still moment the sound of the sea and the moan of the trade seemed inordinately loud. The murmur of gruff voices at the beached boat came dully, like a muttering from very far away. Cherokee Sam Slade looked quickly from one to the other. He

saw the quick and bitter anguish in the eyes of both, and he let his big hands drop slowly to his sides. Then a cutlass scabbard rattled in the darkness where the lanterns swung. In that taut stillness it was a startling sound, like a brazen clash of cymbals in an empty place.

"Naomi!" the lieutenant said. She continued to look at him, making no sound. The light in her eyes went grim and cold, her fists mercilessly clenching down emotion, memory, the bright hope, the eager promise of the past.

HE said her name again: then he came toward her slowly, waving the midshipman boy aside without taking his eyes from her face. Cherokee saw him walk to her that way, a man under a compulsion irresistible. Quite suddenly he remembered the girl's voice, still and deep with passion; and he remembered what she had said: "*Cherokee, did you never one day see a girl—and the two of you walk straightway toward each other as if you both knew all at once—*" He frowned, averting his grizzled head from such a troubling thing. Because her face was different now; it had a bitter, stony look. And her voice was icy and empty of all desire.

"Lieutenant Bruce Graham Wainright of the King's navy!" Her head was back; her eyes flashed; her red lips barely parted to let the thin iron of her words come curling through. "You ought to be so proud! Such a very clever trick with which to murder Salem men!"

"We are at war." He did not flinch. He stood facing her, gaunt and taller by a head than she. The fire flicked ruddy light and dark shadow on the sand between. It glittered on the buckles of his shoes, licked upward now and then to flash glitters of reflected flame from the braid and epaulets of his uniform. But the most of his face was in darkness, a narrow, solid English face with eyes that looked a little hollow in that uncertain light. "Your credit is misplaced. The ruse you saw in use was not a plan of mine. It belongs to Captain Sir Harry Neyland who—"

"Then you may tell your Captain Neyland that—"

"The captain was killed in the action," the lieutenant interrupted with a quiet weariness. "We are ashore to give him burial. It was his wish."

"I thought it strange to see a chaplain in an East India ship." The girl's voice went brittle with scorn. "Honorable John builds his merchantmen one single ton below the peacetime regulation register that would require a churchman be aboard on articles. It is too expensive to keep live men at peace instructed of their God. Only for the war dead, it would seem, can we afford a chaplain's hopeful words!"

"Naomi!" He raised one hand; then in irresolution let it fall again. Now he spoke rapidly, like a man with a thing which must be said; "I had no thought to find you here. Still, I am glad—because ashore you will be safe. You have been in my mind the whole long, bitter cruise—you in your father's whaleship and we bearing across the southern sea to—"

"To destroy us!"

"Yes, to destroy you. That is our commission. With Captain Neyland dead, the command of H.M.S. *Resolve* is mine and—"

"And that thing you will do, Bruce Wainright. Yes; I know you will!" Her voice rose, taut with strain. "I know you well. Faithful eyes that laughed with me so many times. But always there was gunfire hidden deep beneath. I knew it then; I know it now. Tradition and duty are strong steel binding you. Men are faithful to such things."

"Men are faithful to other things as well." Some smiling memory seemed struggling desperately behind the flint and powder of his haggard eyes. Between them this tension lay like an iron bar. They beat their hands against it, reaching blindly to each other, to desire, to the long, bright hope that was so clear on Salem Bay and in Jamaica when the King's band played before the war. But they could not bridge that narrow space now. "Your father always said—"

"My father died in Honolulu. Cherokee and I brought him ashore from the *Naomi Barton* barque. We were here on the beach to rejoin her when—"

"Naomi!" Cherokee spun on his heel. "Be still!"

"And why should I be still?" she wildly cried. "You saw this cowardly trick his captain used against the privateer *Alert*. He had her already heavily out-gunned but that, it seems, was not advantage enough for him. Well, do you think Lieutenant Wainright would not do the same again? Now tell us, sir!" She stepped directly in front of him, her burning face upraised. "You—"

The lieutenant said dully again, "We are at war. I should be missing in my duty otherwise. Yes; it would be done."

"Well, I have a duty too!" The girl's arms hung stiffly at her sides, her fists clenched tight. "I have a duty to the helpless Salem whaling ships and to my brother Ira Barton's privateer, the brig—"

"Naomi!" Cherokee sprang toward her, savagery in his eyes. He seized her arms to silence her. "You are giving information to any enemy who—"

"We already know." Lieutenant Wainright's voice was flat. "An armed brig. The *Yankee Blade* of eighteen guns to furnish convoy to the whaling fleet in consort with the ship *Alert*. She—"

Naomi shook off the harpooner's restraining arm. And suddenly she laughed, a wild keening laugh. "Her you will not murder! She shall be warned your sheer strakes are false and cover deadly guns. We shall see to it—Cherokee and I! Because we saw the *Alert*'s destruction, and we know. We sail at once in a Honolulu sloop to—"

She hurled this defiance at him before she stopped abruptly, choking off the rest with a fist that flew to her mouth too late. Cherokee groaned aloud. The lieutenant's shoulders sagged. A weariness crawled across his blue-gray eyes. "Naomi, you should not have told me that. Now I cannot let you go. If you had not spoken I—" He drew himself erect with effort. He looked away from what he saw behind her eyes. "I am sorry." The words were not spoken, rather they were torn from somewhere in his throat. "I must take you on board until after—" He spun on his heel. "Mr. Vandershort! These two people are under your restraint."

He marched away at once, his sword chains making a tinkling in the night. The girl's stare followed his swaying back, her small fist still tightly at her mouth. Her eyes seemed very bright and the steel no longer flashed, now she did not have to meet the challenge, the fierce, suppressed urgency of his desire. A slow sob gathered in her breast. "He did, Cherokee, what I knew he must and would. I knew. I knew."

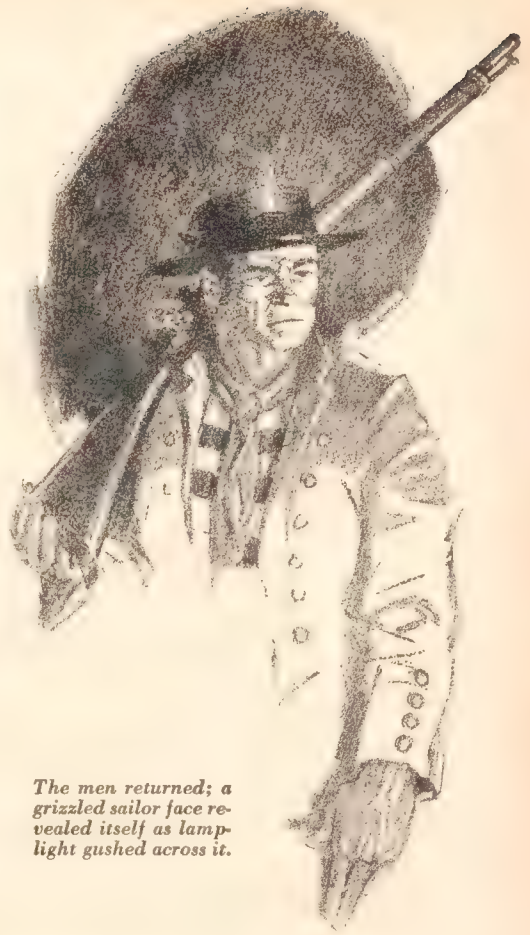
"You said that thing to him, knowing he—"

"Yes!" The sob broke through at last. "Yes." Cherokee kept looking at her where the fireship touched her pale, drawn cheek. "We could never find the *Yankee Blade* at sea. Never, Cherokee! Not with a little sloop. Not in time. She would be destroyed and—"

"Ay!" the old harpooner cut in with his bitter growl. "But he will find her! And the time he does, we will be on board this disguised frigate called *Resolve*! Helpless. We will see your brother's brig smashed. Smashed!" he repeated, gall and wormwood in his voice. "Ay! We will see Ira Barton's *Yankee Blade* deceived the way we saw poor Jack Leclerc's *Alert*! We will see her smashed and crippled, and her men die helpless at their guns. Before our very eyes!"

The little midshipman boy was striding toward them with elation. They saw his swinging lamp, a musketed marine on either side. But the girl remained unstirring. She stared blankly off across the ink-dark night where the stern lanterns of the English man-o-war dipped and rose leisurely in the quiet murmur of the sea off Makapuu.

"Perhaps, Cherokee," she breathed, "perhaps we shall see a very different thing."



The men returned; a grizzled sailor face revealed itself as lamp-light gushed across it.

CHAPTER TWO



R. MIDSHIPMAN PERCIVAL VANDERSHORT's pink cheeks glowed with wholesome British pride by the beached cutter of H.M.S. *Resolve*, disguised third-rate frigate, forty-four. He could make nothing of the long-legged girl with the faraway look in her troubling eyes. She kept her face averted, intent on the stern lanterns of the man-o-war swinging distantly off Makapuu in a pool of phosphorescent seafire. But the wrinkle-faced harpooner with the stocking cap was understandable; he had the seamark on him. The little midshipman, his naval hat at a rakish tilt, was dreaming of promotion along the glory road, and that dream was sweet. His spindly legs were wide spaced on the sand, his boy's thumbs tucked in his breeches belt where the uniform coat flared away. If he wiggled his hands it set his dirk chains jingling, giving him a feeling of good determination.

"We will teach you Yankees some manners yet!" he piped. "So you would take a sloop a-sailing and warn your funny little brig eighteen? Hol!" he chortled. "Well, we will keep you tucked aboard to see you don't! And we'll swallow your brig like ginger beer." He jingled his side-arm chains again. "After that we'll sweep the southern sea of every Yankee whaler. By Nelson's bones, we will!"

Cherokee Sam's head stirred in the lantern-light. "Be careful, lad, should you sail prize-master of one of them,"

The girl seized a pin from its seat...slamming it down against the tripping gear. The disguising wood dropped, showing the gunports.



he sternly growled, the acid of the *Alert's* destruction and Naomi's rash speech still gnawing. "Salem men are fond of the flesh of little midshipmen boys. They bile them whole in the blubber pots. Sperm ile is best, I understand. Then they lick their chops, from the master down, in the dogwatch mess."

"Blasted Yankee insolence! You will—"

Whatever else Mr. Vandershort meant to announce was interrupted by the crash of musket-fire as the party of marines did honorable salute over the fresh grave of flag Captain Sir Harry Neyland, lately in command of H.M.S. *Resolve*. The muffled intonation of the chaplain was heard, the rattle of grounding arms, an order issued in a low, stern voice. Then the men returned. A grizzled sail-or face revealed itself under a stiff, tarred hat as yellow lamplight gushed across it. Then that face withdrew and another took its place, pigtail gleaming over a hairy neck. Lieutenant Wainright remained on the edge of darkness, a silent figure with contemplative eyes awaiting the cutter's launch.

When he came into the sternsheets the boat, urged forward, lifted to the surf swell, then took the water fairly. The launchers vaulted in; the long oars took up their rhythmic clicking in the thole pins. Cherokee Sam, a grim bitterness on him, stared back at the signal-fire on the beach, till it winked a red eye and went out. Naomi had her gaze over a shoulder, watching the huge bulk of the frigate loom larger across a narrowing space of dark sea. Points of starshine sparkled on her canvas, her wall-sided hull rolling with a loud seawash. Lamplight showed at

her entry gangway, and on a part of her false sheer strake being hauled up to be lashed in place once more. Then the cutter skillfully swung for the landing.

"Toss!"

The oars snapped up in two precise banks. The bosun's whistle shrilly piped the new commander's return, barefooted side-boys at salute. They looked goggle-eyed at the girl, coming aboard a King's ship, the harpooner limping after her. The second lieutenant, who had the deck, looked a little astonished too.

"They are out of one of the Salem ships," Wainright curtly explained, "waiting on the beach to rejoin her."

"Then they saw—"

"Precisely, Mr. Columtree! You will see that she—they are given comfort and courtesy. . . . Square the main-yard. The course is east."

"Aye, aye, sir. Four of the *Alert* survivors have died of their wounds. Fourteen remain, sir. They are fit."

The girl came forward. She said coldly, "They are our people. Would it infringe on your duty to let us speak with them?"

Wainright nodded. "Mr. Vandershort will escort you. You are to have my room, Naomi," he added quietly. "I will hold the deck."

"If you will allow"—she turned away, her voice flat—"I shall keep the deck myself."

He watched her grace of movement, her lithe young body giving thoughtless adjustment to the swinging deck before she passed out of wavering lantern-light. But he remained there, his weathered English face betraying no sign of emo-



tion. Except his stern, unflinching eyes, clouded from ceaseless vigil on what things he had not said. Then he stirred, vaguely aware of his second lieutenant, mumbling—complimenting him upon command. He felt no elation, only the stern necessities of the business he had in hand. It was a rancor in him, this trickery against an enemy already inferiorly armed. But here was war, the long, interminable wars. And what had war to do with what a man imagined he could see in the sea-gray eyes of a Salem girl? There was rebellion in those eyes, and in the eyes of Cherokee, a proud rebellion Englishmen ought to understand. These people stemmed from England: they should not be England's enemies! Lieutenant Wainright coughed, moved stiffly aft to examine the traverse board, sweep a quick look aloft to the trim of his heavy spars; then he took to pacing steadily fore and aft along his quarter-deck.

So the long night passed. The ship lazed through the sea, only a main topgallant set above broad topsails in simulation of the cautious night habit of Honorable John's slow merchantmen. Seen that way from across an ocean distance in the first thinning of the night with her main battery gunports hidden from sight by a brightly painted wooden strake, no honest seaman would take her for a cruising frigate of Britain's battle-fleet. She had a look of ease and innocence, but there was deadly, disguised power in her as she swam eastward toward the dawn, hunting the Salem ships for prey.

She emerged slowly out of darkness. First her courses touched watery shadow to her deck, ranging a little. The sea babbled; the steady trade made a pleasant singing in

the lofty webwork of her gear. In that half light the vast ocean stirred like a gray giant restless toward the end of sleep. Pale shapes began to reveal themselves; the sailing-master by the heavy wheel at the quartermaster's shoulder; the angular frame of the commander still measuring the oak, his long shadow crossing and recrossing the gun carriage of the larboard carronade; the forecandle lookout, his striped shirt suddenly brilliant as he moved toward the belfry to strike the double notes. And in the waist the girl in her sea-cape beside Cherokee whose back was braced against the bulwark, his wrinkled face fretful even in his dozing. Because he remembered the *Alert's* destruction, and he could not forget there was nothing left to oppose this deadly frigate now but a little privateer of eighteen guns. Even in a straightforward action the brig was hopelessly outarmed. Taken by surprise, she would not even be able to run, to refuse gunnery with this heavy-armed man-o'-war. The *Yankee Blade* was doomed. And after that the entire whaling fleet, to be picked off one by one.

Naomi Barton had that knowledge too. It was in her sleepless eyes, restlessly searching the sea. Westward only the peaks of Owheehee showed above horizon haze, a gray rumor of the land deepening to purple as the sunrise grew. Tension mounted in the girl with nearing dawn. The onus of this thing was on her; upon her alone. She stirred now, seeing the distant cloud masses flush with a sunfire not yet free of the rim of the sea. With a taut, quick motion, she brushed the hair from her face, looking to the fore crossrees where the lookout hung, the long thin glass at his eye. Then suddenly the dawn exploded, flinging

horizontal bars of fire across the ocean waste. And with it, as at a signal prearranged, came Mr. Midshipman Vandershort's thin voice, urgently crying the deck.

"Sail ho!"

The girl spun her back to the bulwark, head upraised. Cherokee leaped instantly erect, feet planted wide, motionless and waiting. They heard the quarter-deck reply, the quick report from aloft, "Weather bow, sir!" An instant of silence. "Two more sail. Three, sir! Bear a point in the north." Then, shrilly: "Four!"

LIEUTENANT WAINRIGHT sprang to the weather rigging, climbing swiftly, opening his telescope. Excitement flew through the ship, heads aloft, mouths agape. "The *Yankee Blade*!" Cherokee Sam barked hoarsely. "With the Salem fleet rounding down for Makapuu to join the *Alert* with her ile casks full. The *Alert* is destroyed! And we—"

He broke off, helpless, his big paws clenched. The English commander dropped smartly to his deck. Naomi moved her small head to watch him. In the stillness his low voice carried with extraordinary clarity. "Let the ship run as she goes for the present. They will catch the sunfire on our canvas soon enough." He put his head on his shoulder toward the wheel. "Steer large! Let her yaw like a clumsy merchantman." His voice was sharp with strain. "Get the tubs in tow astern, Mr. Columtree, to check her way and make her awkward in maneuver. Overhaul the releasing gear on the false strakes. Charge the guns. Solid shot main battery, grape fore-and-aft caronades. We—"

"The deck!" the midshipman's hail came fluting from aloft. "The leading sail, sir. A brig. She hauls her wind aft and bears down!"

"Very good. Lay below, Mr. Vandershort!"

"More luscious Yankee pie!" Mr. Columtree's broad red face wreathed in a delighted grin. "A pity Captain Neyland is not here to see his clever trick in use again with—"

"Out fore and mizzen t'gallants!" Wainright cut in. "Get the royals on her. It must appear we mean to run. Keep the men out of sight. Shore coats over these uniforms!" He paced stiffly to the break of his quarter-deck. "Prisoners below!"

The girl stood below him, smiling coldly up, oblivious to the sudden rush of activity. For the first time his eyes wavered before what scorn he saw on her face. He wanted to speak, to tell her he had no relish for this deception a dead commander's cleverness had put to use and so put compulsion on him for its use again. But her voice came first, like a whiplash. "It is well to take no risks, having only a forty-four-gun frigate with which to engage a brig eighteen! I am surprised you send me below when—"

"Naomi, I beg you—"

"—when I could so well be used as a decoy!" she finished coldly.

"By my eyes, sir!" Mr. Columtree's excitement exploded with violence. "She doesn't know it, but she's right! Let the Yankees have the deck. Who'd suspect us for a man-o'-war with a woman and that ragged crowd in view? We can have that brig in point-blank range! Point-blank, sir!"

"Mr. Columtree, I am not scoundrel enough to put a woman in the way of gunfire."

"There is not the slightest danger, sir. You know it! We can have them all below to the cable tier in easy time. Before the first broadside goes." He stared hard at his superior who had so lately assumed command. "I submit, we are at war!"

Lieutenant Wainright's shoulders sagged. Yes; they were at war. Every advantage must be used and if that burden were refused there was treason, or at least disgrace, to face. He heard Naomi's ironic laugh. If only she had held her peace! His lips pressed tight. Against his will, he forced the barely discernible inclination of his head.

It made Mr. Columtree chortle with glee before he spun away. But Naomi remained at the foot of the ladderway, that odd, strained pain behind her eyes.

"Cherokee," she breathed to the astonished harpooner at her side, "go for'ard. Mix with the *Alert* prisoners when they come on deck to—"

He cut in hoarsely, "I will never understand why—"

"Joe Blanding will tell you." She started up for the quarter-deck. "Cherokee, do as I say!"

The brig lifted rapidly against the sunrise, leaving her unarmed consorts still hull down. It was plain she too considered H.M.S. *Resolve* a lumbering merchantman to be picked up for an easy prize. There was reason for it. The man-o'-war, towing invisible drags astern, moved slowly despite her press of canvas. On the foredeck the clustered *Alert* prisoners could be seen, and the figure of a girl far aft. A privateer had little to fear from such a ship. So the brig rushed down into the deadly trap, lofty and heavy-sparred, fast as a cloud, flinging her bow wave wide. Suddenly she yawed to bring her bow gun on, the Yankee ensign snapping to the peak. A puff of white bloomed at her eyes; then the faint report was heard. The solid shot sent a spout aloft far short of H.M.S. *Resolve*. Mr. Columtree laughed. "Insolent beggar! Presently we—"

"In royals. Hang t'gallants in the gear. Ready about! Starboard broadside to her." Lieutenant Wainright's orders barked angrily. "Pass the word to the gunners. Mr. Columtree,"—his voice was savage now at what he had to do—"you will personally see the girl and the men are underdecks before the false strakes drop or—"

He let the rest hang. The brig was still beyond long range when the *Resolve* put down her helm. She came clumsily through stays, slapping and surging. During this time Naomi had watched the skillful deception with burning eyes. Sure of easy victory, the men aft paid no attention to her. Now she moved carelessly toward the pinrail. Forward, the men of the destroyed *Alert* did likewise, milling protectively around Cherokee. The girl threw a sharp glance across the sea to where the unsuspecting brig piled canvas to the morning sky, her lean hull dark beneath. Then she raised her arm, a quick fierce signal. Instantly, she seized a heavy pin from its seat, racing to the starboard bulwark. Forward, Cherokee had done the same. And the rest happened with a startling suddenness.

Almost together they brought their heavy irons slamming down against the tripping gear that held the false white strakes in place against the frigate's hull. Somewhere a hoarse voice bellowed warning. Mr. Columtree spun on his heel, crying rage. But he was too late. The restraining ropes, released, skirled through the fairleads. Squarely in the vision of the onrushing brig the broad disguising wood dropped with a banging clatter from her side, revealing at once her solid row of closed gunports, showing her unmistakably for what she was, a razeed man-o'-war, deadly and heavy armed.

Mr. Columtree rushed to the break of the quarter-deck, drawing his pistol, roaring for a ship's corporal. The men of the *Alert* seemed undisturbed, Cherokee in their midst grinning sheer delight. And Naomi stood with her arms stiffly at her sides, her small fists clenched, her stare intent across the ocean space toward her brother's privateer. She heard Lieutenant Wainright cry down his second in command's murderous rage, but she paid no heed. Not until she saw the sudden flutter of those distant headsails; watched the brig stumble in her headlong rush into disaster; saw the big yards swing as Ira Barton, seizing the situation and its meaning instantly, wore his command sharp round upon her heel. Only then did she move her head.

"I must thank you for permitting me to warn the brig. You remember I told you I would."

He stared at her. "Do you mean you deliberately goaded me—"

"Do you suppose I would blurt out to you at Makapuu we meant to sail a sloop to the brig if I really intended to? I am not such a child as that. How would we find her in a smallboat? No! We could never have reached the *Yankee Blade* that way—not in time. But I could make you take me to her. That," the girl cried, a wildness on her, "that I did!"

There was an instant of silence between them. Then: "I am almost glad." The lieutenant said this softly. "Now the action will be straightforward, the way action in a King's ship ought—"

"Action indeed!" Mr. Columtree snarled a large disdain. "There is no disgrace in a brig eighteen refusing action with a frigate of forty-four! She runs like a stag! We will have to chase—"

"I think differently, Mr. Columtree." Wainright could almost smile, now the weight of distasteful, and what he considered dishonorable, trickery against an inferiorly armed enemy was lifted from his shoulders. "The brig will know she stands alone between us and the annihilation of every Yankee whaleship in the southern sea. She—"

The girl cut in, her voice taut with strain: "Yes! He will return! He is a rash and headstrong man. He will sacrifice his brig. He will destroy himself!" The tension in her snapped. She hid her face in her hands, the long sobs racking her. "That is my brother over there. And you, Bruce, you are—"

She said no more. She turned away, rocking a little as she went. And the man in command of H.M.S. *Resolve* was grateful he no longer had to look upon what her anguished eyes revealed. Speech, desire, trembled in him. He had no way of knowing how much longer he could clench it down. This lay between them, this dark and narrow gulf they must not bridge. Not now—not facing the dreadful business presently in hand. He blinked; and when he spoke his voice was the naval voice, the grim, hard, autocratic voice of the quarter-deck.

"Mr. Vandershort! You will see the prisoners safe in the cable tier." He spun sharply on his heel, discarding the distasteful coat to reveal plainly the naval uniform and all the naval lace. "Beat to quarters, Mr. Columtree! Cut the towing tubs adrift! Release that larboard strake. Gunports wide! Sheet home the t'gallants. Put the royals on her. Topmen aloft!" His eyes snapped to his upper spars, then hard at his sailing-master. "Steer her small, Mr. Gaines! He will want the weather gauge. I doubt we can beat him to it. We shall see!"

THE rattle of the drums took charge, crackling through the ship. The white St. George's ensign and all the battle flags snapped smartly to the peak and trucks. Naomi heard that sinister drum chatter, felt the throat-catching impact of it, the tempo of quick excitement running like a flame along the deck. She found Cherokee moving along beside her down the gangway, his eyes burning, his nostrils aflame like an old war-horse hearing the battle bugles blow. And the survivors of the *Alert*, growling elation because they had saved the brig from surprise. But Naomi felt no elation. She knew her brother Ira, who commanded the *Yankee Blade*; she knew the will and passion that lived like steel and powder in that man. And she knew Bruce Wainright and what the gunfire meant behind his smoldering eyes.

Along the battery deck the powder-boys stood ready at the gangways. The gunners were stripped to the waist, hauling the breeching tackles of the heavy guns; the shot racks full; matches dripping into the swabbing tubs. She remembered these quick visions with a violence of clarity, and the last sight she had of the *Yankee Blade* clouded under canvas in the brilliant sun, rushing away to the east with her signal halyards full to warn dispersement to the helpless whaling ships. But in the dank and gloomy cable tier there was nothing to see but the glittering eyes of her



A seaman staggered to the broken rail ... with a look of puzzled bewilderment at his bloodied arm.

compatriots. Silence was down here and hard breathing. Silence and the noise of the rushing sea against the heavy plank. Silence and timbers groaning as the ship went tautly on the wind. Cherokee put an arm awkwardly about her heaving shoulders. But he kept his wrinkled stare upon an oaken knee as if he thought, looking there in fascinated concentration, he might hear familiar sounds to reveal and interpret how the dreadful battle went.

But on the quarter-deck of H.M.S. *Resolve* the action took a clear and precise shape. The frigate stumbled no longer in maneuver. Deception and trickery were at an end. With that need no longer on him, the weary look of irresolution dropped from Wainright's weathered face. His ship showed colors, guns, battle flags, all the trappings of her trade in honest view. Against courageous men, anything less than this touched dishonor; it could hold no glory for a Yorkshire man. Now he could stand erect, doing full honor to the cloth he wore, keenly judge the battle space, test the strength and temper of the weather, gauge the method of his antagonist. Deep within him there was still another pride. The girl with the yellow hair had caught at opportunity; carried it through with daring skill. He was almost grateful. Perhaps an English girl might have done as much; she could have done no better. At any other time Lieutenant Wainright would have smiled. But now there was this business to attend.

The H.M.S. *Resolve* reached west of north, lifting the sun-burnished head of Makapuu again as she hunted the weather gauge well clear of the southern reef. Distantly the brig's signal buntings dropped, snapped aloft, shot down once more. The whaling fleet scattered; the last royal dropped below the rim of the sea. Then, like a cock quail perched on a farmer's fence rail who will not move until his brood is across the open dust and safely in the brush, the headsails of the little privateer flushed red with sunfire as she came about. Taking the starboard tack on a narrowly converging course she, too, rushed to the west of north.

Watching how her bow wave grew, Mr. Columtree could grunt:

"We have a hawk to sail against! By God, sir, you are right! She means to accept the action!"

LIEUTENANT WAINRIGHT said nothing, quietly gauging the sea-room left him between the lee shore of Owhee-hee and the tumbling reef.

The facts, the necessities of the situation walked with calm clarity through his alert brain now. He had his enemy heavily outgunned; she had him as heavily outsailed. She had the weather gauge, could hold it, retaining choice of battle space. He could not force the action, must accept it as she chose. Against a heavier, or even an equal, opponent there would be worry in that land under his lee with the reef to the south and a hawk to keep him penned. His gray, gunpowder eyes were level, but wildfire raced across his brain. If he were that swallow there against the eagle's claws, his instinct told him, he would board. With speed. With brilliant daring. At once! There would lay the only hope of victory.

"Ready about!"—He would test that thing!—"Lay her east!"

The heavy ship came smartly through her stays. Wainright kept his eyes glued on his antagonist, a small brig with twin pyramids of canvas dwarfing a dark hull. Instantly she hauled her wind aft, holding her distance but running astern instead of meeting the opposite tack to lose the precious gauge. His eyes began to glow. There, then, was a seaman who knew his trade! Why not? It was Captain Ira Barton who was a Salem man, and Wainright had some knowledge of the Salem breed.

"Ready about!" he snapped again. "Steer small!"

The privateer hauled up as before and at once. She cruised the bottle's neck. And knew it! The hard dry glitter set in the lieutenant's eyes. Now he knew the temper, the capacity of his enemy. "Trice up the nettings, Mr. Columtree! Prepare to repel boarders, Mr. Vander-short. Pike and cutlass. Stand to!" The commander knew the vital, deadly effect of the first heavy broadside correctly used. "Hold fire till the word is passed!"

The shrill whistles piped. Bare feet raced the sanded decks to stations. The topmen braced themselves aloft. Hands sweated on the musket holds. Eyes flamed with the suppression of excitement, the hot unbearable tension of courage and down-clenched fright, of unspoken hope, of still resolve, of some dear human memory crystal-clear in that instant before action and death and glory burst its flaming torrent overhead and the gods of battle did their will with those the gods alone would choose in grim, ironic jest. Till that feeble little brig took aft her wind, choosing her moment now. She stood down with her eyes aboil, her hawsepipes dripping brine like gore. And that way the fevered tension lay, stillness mounting like a living thing across the sea and in the ships at war.

"Ease helm, Mr. Gaines." How loud, how commonplace the commander's words could sound! Like a fateful, hollow echo in a hollow, empty ship. "In royals. T'ga'n'sls in the gear. Steady. . . . Steady!"

So she waited for explosion and gunfire off the head of Makapuu, ponderously rolling, the seawash strong. Sure. Undisturbed. She had the weight and pride of Empire to

sustain her at her back. She had Drake, Hawkins, Nelson; fabulous sea fighting giants with the seadogs' eye to stand in shadowy assistance on that uneasy quarter-deck. But the little brig came down against tradition's heavy weight, against deadly armament. She flew down boiling, gallant, foolhardy, the young Yankee ensign taut. What did *she* have, so willingly to spring against death's obliterating jaw? Little enough. A dangerous dream, a new nation's hope, a vision of human freedom pulsing in that hidden place where some men know for sure the spirit lives. As little as this there was to give her sustenance in moments before men knew they were about to die.

She closed the range with appalling speed. The blocks knocked out along the battery of H.M.S. *Resolve*, and the depression screws worked lower, preparing for destructive, point-blank fire before the enemy closed to board; the gunners lay their gleaming eyes along the dispart sights. On the quarter-deck Mr. Columtree cried out, "She yaws!" And scornfully: "At range a quarter mile!"

A bloom of gushing smoke blotted her bow; an instant later the solid crash of a single gun smashed the expectant stillness to ribbons. The shot fell short—a ranging gun. Still Lieutenant Wainright frowned. That geyser in the sea was most astonishingly close! Her bow swung on again, but did not hold. She moved part of her port battery to bear. A trickle of doubt about her started upward along the commander's spine, that trickle in him growing as he watched, gushing upward to his brain, exploding there. The brig did not intend to board, but only make it appear she would! The dark shape of a man hung halfway up her after shrouds, growing in stature till his arm flung down. A single gun of her larboard battery lashed flame and smoke, testing the range again.

In a man forward the tension snapped. "Blasted Yankee pointers!" he shrieked. "Do they think—"

The explosion rocked across the brilliant sea. A humming sounded in the air. The man's voice ended in a scream of agony and was still. The heated shot crashed splinters from the bulwark opposite. They were out-ranged! In that bitter moment Wainright knew for certain the brig's strategy for the first blow had outwitted him.

"Starboard gunners, Mr. Columtree!" Wainright's voice was harsh. "Lay her—"

The brig's broadside, bearing full, smashed with a single mighty roar. The smoke beached upward over her in enormous clouds. The shot sank insanely, then tore at solid oak. The British battery answered. But the range and point was new, unexpected. The fire came ragged. She luffed, ponderously—and as she did, the quarter-deck could see the brig's yards swing above the yellow smoke as she hauled sharp round to check her overrun and bring her starboard battery to rock new echoes from the cliffs of Owhee-hee. Then she took her wind abaft the beam and, leaning deeply, shot away beyond the range of Mr. Columtree's beloved guns.

THIS was the pattern of her audacious battle plan. Taking full advantage of her speed and her most expert gunnery, she stood off to swab and reload in safety, dancing on the sunlit sea as momentarily the battle smoke went clear.

The surprise of that first hammer blow could never be repeated, but it had served its purpose well and she had delivered it almost unscathed. The first dead dotted the deck of H.M.S. *Resolve*, the first wounded were being carried to the cockpit below. And the mizzen mast, swaying, sent the topmen wildly sliding to the deck before it rolled down with a rending crash, carrying main top-hammer with it.

"Cut away that blasted raffle!" roared red-faced Mr. Columtree. Then he swung around, flinging his arm to windward. "He fights his ship flying all his highest kites, that ragamuffin there!"



"This ship," he said with clearness that was absolute, "will strike to no craft afloat!"

He referred to Ira Barton, still hanging hooked in the brig's main shrouds. He had a pipe between his teeth; he wore a flaming flannel shirt and a battered, shapeless, gray felt hat; and he looked as if he had just caught casual sight of the spout of a pod of whales instead of the drooling guns of a British man-o'-war.

Now distantly he took his brig through the eye of the wind once more, bearing her east by south to keep the frigate penned between the peak of Makapuu and the southern reef while he himself ran free. Lieutenant Wainright's eyes were burning. The fever of battle touched him. But there was admiration there, a twinge of regret behind relentless blue-gray eyes that men like these were enemies.

"Hold the larboard fire!" He wondered if these calm and quiet words were really his. "Mr. Gaines! Lay me close aboard."

It was a master's mate who answered; Mr. Gaines was not in sight. And the little brig flew down, all her lofty, sunshot canvas reaching to the sky. Once more her lean hull sheathed itself in flame and smoke, winging death across an empty space. The frigate took dreadful punishment to close effective range. Then her overpowering broadside spoke, rocking in one convulsive roar. This time her heavy guns bit deep. The drifting smoke poured over her. Rifting here and there, it revealed the brig's scuppers trickling red. Hulled in half a dozen places, tatters of torn gear streaming aloft, her lower canvas gap-

ing, she stumbled away, leaving what destruction she could behind. But still she kept on coming down. Again and again she limped off, her functional loveliness maimed and broken, only to work through stays and bear doggedly down once more: The swallow against the hawk—the terrier against the wounding, crippling lion's claws.

Lieutenant Wainright clenched his fists. Through the stinking smoke of battle he could still see Captain Ira Barton leaning above his narrow quarter-deck with one arm idly hooked around a shroud. Strange compulsion came upon him, to scream out to that gaunt and tattered shape comfort and some reassurance. As a man would to another he found he could admire. . . . Strike! Strike, you gallant fool! You cannot tear a King's frigate forty-four apart, with bare hands. Not with that look shining behind your stony eyes! You want guns for that. Guns! And we've the guns. I have no stomach for the murdering of honest men. Strike! You can do no more. You have already done enough! . . . This urge welled chokingly in Wainright's chest; he could barely fight it down.

But all the time he knew that brig would never strike that tattered, starry ensign from its place—he knew it by the careless look which that young seaman in a shapeless hat could hold while his ship splintered apart beneath his very feet.

"By my eyes!" Wainright heard his second in command bellow this echo to his thought, sudden admiration torn from Mr. Columtree against his will. "He could have sailed with Nelson, that ragged whaler there!"

So went that famous action off the head of Makapuu, in view of whitely marching trade clouds while the sun climbed steadily and the ocean heaved with a vast, indifferent disdain. Down below, in the cable tier of H.M.S. *Resolve* the shuddering impacts came like a mad convulsion of the sea. Down there one man kept growling incoherent rage; and when the still spaces came he sobbed and was abruptly still—till the thunder roared once more and the ship heeled down to the cannonade. Then he took his meaningless shouting up at once, knowing the brig must be, miraculously, still afloat. They heard the smashing roar of wreckage overhead, the rumbling gun carriages, the dull crying, the muffled screams.

Cherokee Sam Slade just stared, his eyes wild and wide on emptiness.

"Her mizzen—by the board." The old harpooner growled hoarse and broken words. To himself and no one else. "That would be Ira's master gunner. Caleb Brown has a keen, gray pointer's eye."

But Naomi Barton kept her fine head bowed, her chin upon her chest, only her shoulders moving now and then "A brig, Cherokee." She kept repeating this over and over in a dull tone. "Ira's feeble brig eighteen against a heavy frigate forty-four. It's Ira and Bruce. Ira and Bruce!"

WHEN the final stillness came, it was a thing to be given no credence or trust. They looked at each other—quick, questing glances out of shining eyeballs. In a moment more the guns would surely roar. But this time the silence held. Like a stillness ultimate and absolute. The hurricane lamp splashed yellow light and weird shadows over the hawser fakes. Then a heavy tread sounded; the gangway opened; a gruff voice spoke words of doom in a booming, hollow cave:

"You may come on deck."

No one stirred. They remained where they were, like people entranced. They took no belief in the substance of that voice, till it repeated itself, an echo that came too late: "You may come on deck!"

Cherokee Sam's leonine head gave way at last. His voice grated brokenly.

He said, "She is gone."

And Naomi Barton sobbed: "She is destroyed!"

They followed the powder-grimed marine in silence where the battle lanterns smoked, hearing sounds from the cockpit it is better for men soon to forget. Till they reached the sight of heaven and the shambled deck of H.M.S. *Resolve*. Here they stopped suddenly at what met their eyes. The frigate's deck was a welter of confusion and rubble, gun-carriages askew, her woodwork splintered, her mizzen mast a jagged stump, her mainmast severed at the top, foregear streaming ragged in the wind as the heavy ship rolled down. Grotesque shapes spotted the sanded oak, oddly blotched. There was nothing left of Mr. Vandershort except a cocked midshipman's hat tipped against a dismounted carronade as if some one had idly tossed it there. He would never wiggle his boy's fingers any more in his breeches belt to hear his dirk chains clink. And far aft Mr. Columtree still stood amidst the wreckage of the quarter-deck, Lieutenant Wainright towering beside him. He was crying out across a narrow space of sea.

Crying? Odd! And to whom?

Cherokee moved his head. "The brig! She floats!"

NOW they saw her plainly. She was such a sight upon the heaving swell as men could not forget. A broken cheer started welling from a dozen throats; froze suddenly and died away.

For the brig was completely dismayed. Two jagged stumps stood above her broken deck, littered with rubble and inert dots. Her wheel was splintered. Her hull looked black against the violence of sunlit blue. The sea took hold of her, lifted her a little, then dropped her in a pool of foam, making a loud, clear, gushing noise. She was down by the head, her shattered bowsprit heeled aloft. No wonder the Yankee men no longer had the heart to cheer. But they could move aft, compelled that way by what they saw and heard.

Two men stood aft in that maimed and dying ship, chaos all around them, the brazen sky aloft, a tattered ensign bearing fifteen stars and fifteen stripes nailed to a whipstaff lashed to the mainmast stump. One of them stolidly chewed on a cud of Salem twist, holding a boarding-cutlass in his hand. The other was lean and tall and narrow shaped. His face was angular and bony, as if built up of little teakwood blocks catching highlights where the sun had weathered its crags a deeper hue. He wore a flannel shirt, and on his head a battered old felt hat. He had a Massachusetts squirrel gun loosely by the barrel in his big brown fist, the carved butt at his feet.

The men and Naomi moved aft; they moved in silence, urgently drawn closer to that man: He had such strength in him, and that look imperious. And then they heard a sharp New England drawl sounding on the northeast trade, the voice of home, giving purpose and meaning to death and gunfire off the head of Makapuu.

"This ship—" he said it with a clearness that was firm and absolute—"this ship will strike to no craft afloat!"

"Who asks your ship to strike?" they heard Lieutenant Wainright roar in a strange and sudden thrust of pride. "You have saved your convoy and the whole Pacific whaling fleet! We could not chase or take a shallow now, the shape your brig has put me in. The best we can do is work down Kaiwi Channel under jury rig to refit or interne in Honolulu Bay. Who in blazes asks your colors down? You have fought your ship to glory and—"

"I do not fight for glory, sir, but for what things men must!"

Ira Barton stirred at something that caught the corner of his eye. On the forecave head of H.M.S. *Resolve* a stunned seaman staggered to the broken rail, the cannonade still ringing in his half-deaf ears. Seeing still the colors of his enemy, his arm thrust out instinctively, the pistol cocked. On the sinking hulk the man in the shabby hat moved with a quick, unhurried ease, the squirrel gun discharged at his hip. The seaman's pistol exploded

upward harmlessly, leaving him to stand with a look of puzzled bewilderment at his suddenly bloodied arm.

"Cease firing!" bellowed Mr. Columtree, his red face smeared with powder-smoke. "Blast you all! Cease firing for'ard or—"
"Bruce!"

Naomi cried out the commander's name in a wild alarm, her fist at her mouth. Cherokee looked sharply at her, then across the sea space between the ships of war. He saw a wounded Yankee gunner on the poop of the broken brig drag himself painfully to one knee. Roused by the renewed sound of firing, that man saw the British quarter-deck through blurring eyes, and all the British naval lace. Toward it his cocked musket pointed, the muzzle trembling with the intensity of his final will.

"Bruce!"

Cherokee sprang instantly in front of her, thrusting her away, a low growl in his throat. He took the narrow ladder in a single leap. He hurled himself in front of Wainright, having time for nothing else. That musket flashed; the shot crashed out; then the Yankee gunner collapsed, his arms sprawled wide, his weapon clattering.

The impact of the ball staggered the old harpooner. But he held his feet, stumbling to the rail. Here he dragged himself upright, hanging on. And that way he stood when Naomi reached him, a wild pride in his wrinkle-pocked eyes commanding her to silence. Because he understood this thing at last, and all the puzzlement was gone. Here was the meaning of the cutlass wounds of '81, the long anguish, the throat-catching glory he had felt but never quite made out. Now it lay revealed, with a blinding clarity as sharp as pain. It was in the look of that ragged master, erect on the shattered deck of a foundering little brig with an old felt hat on his head and a smoking gun held idly in his fist.

"He has a navy," Cherokee could growl, "a navy and a nation in his eyes!"

He hung on, severely frowning, hearing Lieutenant Wainright's voice.

"The brig sinks beneath your feet! Damn it, man! Bring your wounded clear."

"There is no boat."

"Longboat away!" Mr. Columtree roared it out to cover what unwilling admiration stirred in him. "Blast you! Have we no sailors left? Longboat! Longboat away!"

So they came over, the wounded, the man who calmly chewed on a cud of Salem twist, and Captain Ira Barton. Those two stood in the sternsheets with their weapons in their hands, a stained cutlass and a Massachusetts squirrel gun, symbolizing no surrender, symbolizing no defeat, their ensign still left lashed to a whipstaff fished to the mainmast stump of a fighting brig called *Yankee Blade*. The boat bumped the ponderous side of H.M.S. *Resolve*. Ira started up the ladder for the entry port. And when he did the prisoners of the destroyed *Alert* moved together toward the rail. They moved out of instinct. They gave it no conscious thought. Some inner urge alone impelled them. They could think of nothing else except to stand there in a silent, ragged, respectful cluster when a shipmaster out of Salem stepped the deck.

Mr. Columtree saw them. His face flushed a deeper red. He blinked his eyes, and then he set his naval hat aright. "Dress ship!" his gruff voice rasped. "Where's a blasted drummer boy? Have we no bosun left? Or at least a bosun's mate to pipe the whistle when a naval captain comes on board!"

SO the English whistles shrilled and an English boy with a bloody face gave the long dry ruffle on the drum to honor Ira Barton when he reached the planks of oak. He stopped there an instant, looking quietly around.

"Hello, Joel," he drawled to one of the tattered side-boys. "Good to see you, Ned," he told another. "I left your woman and the babe both well." Then he touched his

hand to an eye in salute to the quarter-deck. "Your disguising, false sheer strakes, sir," he drawled dryly to the commander of H.M.S. *Resolve*. "Very neat! But you released them a little too soon. Otherwise we—"

"It was your sister, Captain Barton. She cleverly goaded me into bringing her aboard a King's ship so she could give you warning as she did."

Ira came toward Naomi, dragging his gun butt along the deck. Cherokee still clung to the rail, pain taut along his wrinkled cheek. He was watching the look in Lieutenant Wainright's eyes, seeing that man too come walking toward the girl. He sagged a little, as if his legs were leaden now.

"Cherokee," he heard her say in her throaty voice, "Cherokee, why—"

IT came clearer. The gathering mists no longer troubled him. "There was a high-breasted girl with chestnut hair," he growled, something like a smile behind his stubborn eyes. "I remember now! How we once walked straightway toward each other, as if we both knew all at once—"

He stopped on that, moving his head with a slow and grave deliberation. He sighed. How lovely this ocean, how warm and sweet the pleasant northeast trade. Now the stillness after gunfire seemed intense, the burbling sea and the wind's low moan inordinately loud as the crippled frigate surged off the sunshot head of Makapu'u. That way the silence held while they watched a battered, mastless little brig quickly settling, beginning her last long slide with all the light of heaven on her. Cherokee thought he heard voices: The British commander's English tone, and Ira Barton's drawl. They really sounded much the same, he thought.

"You, sir"—that was the tall lieutenant, no mistake—"you have a familiar North Sea look. Like kin of my own at home. You have the look of a Yorkshire man."

"It can hang on. Our grandfather came from the wolds of York. But we"—the Yankee captain said this hard and firm—"we are Salem men!"

"There ought to be room in a place like that for one more Salem man."

Some brittle thing quickly slipped past Ira Barton's lips. "There is no more room in Salem for an Englishman than there was in Boston Harbor for excised English teal!"

Cherokee frowned. That was the steel and powder that lived and burned in Ira Barton's heart. It wasn't right, he thought. Men from the wolds of York should not be enemies. He ought to tell them! But he found he couldn't, for the lieutenant's voice reached to him like a sound from very far away. "But I am speaking of Americans, Captain. Surely there would be room in Salem town and in a Salem ship for another one. And for his wife. After the wars are done."

Presently Cherokee would smile at that. But not yet. The old harpooner's apple-wrinkled face took on a look of concentrated effort. There was a thing he had to see before the darkness closed. He watched for it with utmost care. Now there! That ragged ensign flying still, taut and close above the lipping foam. He reached out, in silence pointing to it. He saw it pluck under, but it didn't matter; he was certain it would lift again another time and in another place.

"The whaling fleet, sir!" he said, going slowly down. He meant much more than that. He meant shabby Continentals, freezing at Valley Forge. He meant bearded men from the Chesapeake, dying with Hull and Porter and John Paul Jones. He meant the look of Salem Quay and Massachusetts Bay. He meant the flame kept bright in darkness, signaling men some promise and a little hope. But words were difficult for Cherokee to find and form. No matter. Words were unimportant while men like Ira Barton lived. The time was short. This would have to do: "The Yankee whaling fleet," he said with firm and stubborn emphasis, "the Yankee whaling fleet is safe."



Mr. Sangamo stared at Mitch. "It is a pity," he said.
"It is indeed," said Mitch. He frisked Sangamo quickly.

No Time for Glory

A secret service man deals with a Lower California situation which was to reach its climax on December 7th, 1941.

by RICHARD SALE



THE name of the pier was the Mudhole, dubbed by some enterprising *Yanqui* imperialist—who had developed Del Norte as a big-game fishing center—in memory of the famous mudhole at Ambrose Lightship, back in New York. . . . Mitchell Prescott walked its length, looking over the boats. They were not charter boats. They were all privately owned. The charter boats were at another pier. He finally paused before the stern of a cabin cruiser named *Unagi*, and he set down his two bags and stared at the swarthy little Mexican in the stern.

"*Buenas noches*," Mitch said.

The man just stared at him.

"You speak English?" Mitch asked.

"Sure, I speak English. What you want?"

Mitch unfolded his hands and moved across the pier. He put one foot on the *Unagi's* transom, and leaned down as if to confide. His peaked cap was set crookedly on one side of his head in a careless manner, and his tanned lean face, hollowed at the cheeks, relaxed its long lines from nose to jaw. He said in a low voice: "The use of your boat to change my clothes, *amigo*."

"Go to a hotel," said the swarthy man. "This is Señor Sangamo's boat, not to be dirtied by one like you."

"Ten dollars, American."

The swarthy man sucked his lips. "*No hablo Ingles*."

"Twenty dollars, American."

"A lot of money to change one's clothes," said the Mexican.

"True," Mitch said quietly. He stood up.

"Why do you not go to a hotel?"

"I am going to a hotel," Mitch said. "But first I must change my clothes. I look to be a scoundrel."

Down the bay, there was the mournful sound of a ship's whistle. They both looked out across the moonlit darkness of the harbor, westward toward the Boca del Lobo. The *Steel Maiden*, an American freighter of eight thousand tons, was passing through the strait. The two black headlands which protected Del Norte from the long rolling swells of the Pacific dwarfed the ship. She had only running-lights. Mitch was glad to be rid of her. He watched her go without regret. Soon she disappeared behind the black bulk of Mt. Tepic, into the long reach of Viscaino Bay and the ocean.

"I see," said the Mexican. "It is important that you change your clothes because you have jumped your ship."

Mitch made a fist with one hand. But the Mexican said quickly: "Do not worry, señor, I am the mos' discreet of men. Shall we say fifty dollars American?"

"All right," Mitch said.

"In advance, señor."

Mitch paid him. From his hip pocket, he took out a revolver. He said mildly: "You see this, *amigo*? This is what I keep for *lenguas largas*. You know what a *lengua larga* is?"

The Mexican licked his lips. "*Si, señor*."

"You come below with me while I change. What's your name?"

"Alvarez."

"You first, Alvarez."

They went down into the main cabin. Mitch hastily stripped the seaman's clothes from himself. He washed and cleaned up and then put on a white shirt and a white linen suit. He looked quite different. A pair of white shoes put on the finishing touch. A good American tourist, the mirror told him. "Not bad, eh?"

"*Muy bueno*," said Alvarez, his dark eyes restless.

"Not bad at all," said Mitch. "The señoritas will go for this rig, eh, Alvie? What's the name of this burg—Del Norte? I'm going to like it here. You don't know where I could get a good job, no work, easy money?"

"No, señor."

"You don't know much, do you?" Mitch said. "For instance, you don't know me, do you? You never saw me tonight, and you will never see me again." He picked up his revolver, let the light glitter on it significantly, then put it in his hip pocket. "Right?"

Alvarez swallowed. "*Si, señor*. I know nothing."

"Bring up my bags," Mitch said. "For fifty dollars American, you can do that. This is a very fine boat. A very good fisherman. Who did you say owned her?"

"Señor Ichiro Sangamo," said Alvarez, choked.

"Don't know him," Mitch said. "But she is nice. Well found and well built. Nice boat to go fishing in. Radio-telephone too. Radio direction-finder. All the trinkets and gadgets. Very nice. Just put the bags on the pier there."

"*Si*," said Alvarez. "Believe me, señor, I tell no one."

"That would be extremely wise and healthy," Mitch said with a smile. "Would you recommend a hotel?"

"Casa Grande is the best hotel in Del Norte," Alvarez said.

"No doubt, no doubt," Mitch replied. "But on the other hand, in a country such as this, where a cutthroat like yourself bleeds me of fifty dollars, it might be wiser to get something not the best, you know. Is there a cheaper one?"

"*Si*, the Casa Cervantes, on Calle Violeta. It does not cost much and it is very good. It has no bedbugs and it gives service, light and hot water."

"Excellent," Mitch said. "*Buenas noches*, Alvarez. I hope I do not find it necessary to make your acquaintance again."

Alvarez swallowed. "*Buenas noches*, señor."

Mitchell Prescott left the Mudhole slips and went up from the waterfront to the modern sea wall which overlooked the harbor. He set down his bags and leaned on the stone balustrade wearily, his eyes hard. The moon hung over Mt. Tepic, westward, and the waters below were bathed in the light. The sea was very placid. On the northern sector of the sweep of waterfront, he could see the little wharves and docks where the fishermen were tied up, sails reefed, engines stilled. Directly on the water

were the basket houses, built on stilts, their roofs of palm, their walls of termite-proof bamboo.

Back from the sea, the hills rolled upward to the heights of Mt. Animas, and the houses became sandstone. They leaned against each other affectionately, weathered and gray. They had been there a long time. Del Norte was an old city with a new side to it, the southern side. But the walls of the past with crenelated towers rising above ancient battlements still stood erect and bold, prepared for an invader who had never come. The sea wall on which Mitch stood was more recent, part of the American development of the new city as a sport fishing center; it protected the whole of the new city from any easterly blows, and there was a fine macadam avenue behind it, Calle Oceano, which skirted the bay for four miles with an excellent view of the hills and sea.

Mitch breathed deeply. The air smelled good. He turned and rested his elbows on the balustrade and looked up at the city which rose on the hills: A fine big haystack in which to find needles!

He inquired of a passer-by the route to Calle Violeta. By good fortune, it was not far from where he stood. As he walked, he became aware of the fact that Baja California was a land of curio-shops, bookstores, leather goods, Pueblo tiles, wood carvings and general trivia of no value to anyone in the world except a gringo tourist. Casa Grande, the hotel which Alvarez had mentioned as the best, was plainly visible. He considered it as he walked. From the dark sea, it must have appeared a very pretty sight; it was of dead white stucco and lighted by a variety of spotlights hidden nicely in the shrubbery at its base, or on its ascending tiers, which pyramided skyward.

Calle Violeta was a narrow offshoot of the ocean boulevard and he had no trouble finding the small neat-faced Casa Cervantes, a brown-framed structure three stories high, but in a decent neighborhood and without a sprinkling of cuthroats around its portals. He went in and got a room on the top floor. It opened out on his own personal balcony. He liked that. . . . Doña Maria Cervantes, the patroness, weighed close to three hundred pounds and was a fascinating sight to behold.

"You are most welcome, señor," Doña Maria said. "I will give ver' good room with watercloset. That ees rare thing in Del Norte, room with watercloset. You will be staying for the sports?"

"Yes," said Mitchell Prescott. "For the sports. *Cuanto es?*"

"Two per day," she said.

"Pesos?"

"No, no, you sly one," she said, wagging her finger. "Two dollars, not pesos. And ver' cheap at such a price. Miguel, do me the favor of showing the Americano to *Numero 12, pronto*. I hope you will like Casa Cervantes, señor. You tell all your rich friends, no? I hope you will like Mexico."

"I already like Mexico," Mitch replied, bowing. "The lovely land of tours and lotteries. My gambling blood tells me I will be very happy here."

"Bueno," she said. "*Buenas noches*."

Miguel, a lean tall youth, dark-skinned but not greasy, with brooding eyes and a sober set of jaw, guided Mitchell Prescott upstairs. Miguel's teeth were white and perfect—these people all had fine teeth—and he wore dark trousers and a white coat. "Your room, señor."

It was very pleasant. Located in the new city, Casa Cervantes boasted all modern conveniences, including electricity and running water. The place was clean.

"You may tell your mother, Miguel—she is your mother?"

"Yes, señor."

"Thought I detected a note of maternal authority in her voice there. You may tell your mother the room is charming."

"*Gracias*, Señor Prescott. Shall I open your luggage and lay out your things?"

"No, thank you," Mitch said evenly. "Don't touch my bags." The young Mexican looked very earnest and rather tense. "That will do for the time being."

"I will leave your keys right here, sir."

"Good. *Es todo*. That's all."

Miguel did not move.

"Maybe it's not all," Mitch said. "Something on your mind, *amigo*?"

Miguel said, uneasily: "Señor—it is not of my business. But I was sitting on the terrace when you arrived, so it happened that I saw them."

"Saw who?"

"The señor was not aware that he was followed here?"

Mitch got up and went to the window. He made a pretense of pulling the shades halfway down. They had been up quite high. He came back, his face hard. "The two yellow boys?"

"Yes, señor. They are Japanese. They are not pleasant men, Señor Prescott. I am acquainted with them. Not personally. But I know their habits. The plump one is Tsu Koji. The tall one is Nobuo Sato."

"Think nothing of it," Mitch said. "Thanks for the anxiety. They've made a mistake—or you have. Why should they follow me?"

Miguel shrugged, but his eyes flickered. "You will wish some food served? Some drinks?"

"No, thanks," Mitch said. "I'm bound for Casa Grande and a dinner fit for a king. Haven't had a decent meal in over a week and I intend to splurge. You are a very interesting fellow, Miguel. I am sure we are going to be friends. *Es todo*."

Miguel nodded and went out, closing the door softly.

CHAPTER TWO



ITCH was sitting at a table in the Café Americano, at the Casa Grande, and he was gorging himself on the sight of white linens, bright silver and beautiful women, when someone paused behind him and said: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Prescott, but I would like to join you at your table if you would be so kind."

"Unless you are a beautiful señorita with a weak will and a heart of gold—and obviously you are not," Mitch said without looking up, "go away."

"Forgive me," said the voice, "if I take the liberty."

A man sat down in the chair opposite him. The stranger was a Japanese, short, thin and rather Occidental. Not either one of the two Mitch had seen from his hotel window. This wee blight was very dainty and graceful; he wore a dark business suit, despite the heat, which was rather sticky. His conservative cravat was tied around a starched winged collar, and he carried a cane with which he rubbed his chin aimlessly. As for his looks, there was much of thick-lensed spectacles and protruding buck teeth, a ubiquitous smile due to the formation of his mouth, and a lack of hair, for it was clipped extremely short and close to the head. He sucked in his breath and said: "Your pardon, Prescott. But after all, since you saw fit to use my boat, I think it only reciprocation that I use your dinner-table."

Mitch pointed at him. "You're Sangamo, the guy who owns that lovely motorboat where I changed my dummies."

"Ah, how clever of you!" Sangamo said. "You are quite right. Ichiro Sangamo."

Mitch's right hand disappeared under the table. He continued to eat with his left hand. The movement did not escape Mr. Sangamo. He kept smiling. Mitch said: "Some *tequila*, some *pulque*, some *saké*, some *aguardiente*, some *mescal*? Name yore pizen, pardner. It's on me. Though in a manner of speaking, I don't owe you anything. I paid dough to change my clothes."

Mr. Sangamo placed an envelope on the table and pushed it toward Mitchell.

"What's that?" Mitch asked.

"Your fifty dollars," Mr. Sangamo said.

Mitch put down the glass of *aguardiente* and smiled. "Not really! Did you pull his eyeteeth too? Why didn't he swallow it when he saw you coming? I understood that it was impossible to separate a leech like good old Alvarez from his hard-earned money."

"Please," said Mr. Sangamo. "It is nothing. I do not charge because someone changed clothes in my boat. When Alvarez reported to me that you had been there, I assumed that he had blackmailed you. We will forget all about it, eh?"

Mitch did not touch the envelope. "What is your pound of flesh, Mr. Sangamo?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Please take your money, Prescott San. I apologize for Alvarez. He tends to be unscrupulous, but he is an excellent fishing-master, and good ones are rare. So I keep him to tend my boat. I am so very, very sorry. Please accept my most abject apologies. It is most interesting to meet you." He beamed. "It is very hot tonight, is it not? I do not like heat. It is so interesting to point out that the modern section of Del Norte with its superior science has macadam which melts in the heat and becomes so very sticky, while the old city with its crude sciences, has cobbles for streets, placed there by the Spaniards so long ago, and of course the heat does not affect them."

Mitch looked wary. "It is so interesting," he said.

"Yes," Mr. Sangamo nodded.

"*Arigato*," Mitch said, "for the fifty smackers."

"Ah? You speak Japanese?"

"A little," Mitch replied. "Had to learn a little in self-defense. I once had a Jap busboy. I had to speak it. I couldn't even ask him to pour me a drink until I got Japanese-in-Five-Easy-Lessons."

"That is so very interesting."

"You speak very good English—"

"I speak good English, Spanish, German and French. I am a linguist. It is a hobby. Also I have another hobby. People are my hobby too. It is a very fascinating hobby. It is so very wonderful, being interested in people."

"And you are interested in me?"

"*Nani!*" Mr. Sangamo said, appalled. "Please don't think of such a thing. One is only so very curious as to why a gentleman like yourself would wish to change his clothes in a strange boat."

"Maybe I was pretty dirty. Maybe I wanted to get presentable before going to a hotel."

"But to carry a pistol!" Mr. Sangamo said.

"That Alvarez is a regular clam, isn't he?" said Mitchell Prescott evenly. "Speak-no-Evil Alvarez, the boys all call him. Besides, it is not a pistol, friend Ichiro. It is a revolver, caliber .38."

"It is so very unusual."

"It is a very good gun for duck-hunting," said Mitch. "The season is open. Pass me a bird dog."

"You are acting quite silly, you know."

Mitch raised his brows. "You're right. And there is no point to it. I'm not the one in a jam. I'm not the one with a gun-muzzle on a line with my belly. And don't say, 'What a lovely etching behind you, Prescott San!' My back is against the wall, and that means there is no one behind me. If you look at anyone else in this hovel with a crossed eyelash, it's a one-way ticket to the old country, Itch, and I mean in an urn."

Mr. Sangamo rubbed his chin with the handle of the cane, and an expression of sadness crept into his eyes. "This is too bad. I am disappointed. I thought you might be useful to me. But I see you cannot be. You are not thinking."

"Dear sir," Mitch said, "yours of the inst. received and contents noted. The debtor is aware that you haven't informed the police about his presence as yet, but it strikes him, possibly, that you too do not wish a close acquaintance

with that annoying business of Law—which does not preclude the fact there is monkey-business. One holds the gun because one wishes time to plan. It is so interesting. One has to make quick plans quickly."

"That is better," Mr. Sangamo sighed. "Much better, Prescott San. Or shall we drop this pretense and call you Mitchell San? Or shall I call you John?"

He said it with a straight poker face, not even allowing the mild elation and sense of offense to appear in his eyes. Mitchell Prescott played it the same way. "John Mitchell seems to be a familiar name," he said. "It is not mine, of course."

"Of course."

"At the same time, I trust Mr. Koji and Mr. Sato replaced my luggage neatly when they had finished examining it? Also I congratulate you and them on the celerity. Much celerity. It is breath-taking. And now that the sonata has hit a sour note, where do we go from here?"

"That depends upon you," Mr. Sangamo said. "Put your gun away. Some one might see it. The café is very crowded."

"It is, isn't it?" Mitch said, keeping his right hand below the table. "It is quite a Mecca here. A lot of Hollywood. I see a producer many chorus-girls would give a right arm to be able to blackmail. Al Roche of Mogul Pictures, over there. Yes, and I do believe I see the fourth son of Charley Chan, none other than the eminent young Chinese featured player, Willie Cheng. And over there I see a very beautiful girl—the one with the monodoc guy and the young sportsman. Come, come, Mr. Sangamo. You're omniscient. Who is she?"

"Her name is Merritt, Miss Polly Merritt of Coronado Beach." He looked uncomfortable. "You know her?"

"Never saw her before in my life. But I'd like to know her. She's out of this world . . . a dream, walking. You were saying?"

"I was saying," Mr. Sangamo replied, "that I have no intention of turning you over to the authorities."

"Good. We are both agreed on that. Your hobby again." He beckoned at a waiter. "*Muchacho, aguardiente* for two, *hagame el favor*. . . The trouble, Itch, is that you don't sound credible."

"People in trouble are always useful. It is very safe to work with a man who is wanted. You give him protection, and you can count on his support because, in a manner of speaking, he must count on yours. A balance of power."

"Sounds like a stacked deck to me."

"No, no, a mutual trust."

"I don't trust you."

"Nor I you, but perhaps it will be to our mutual advantage to trust each other, just a little."

Mitch began to look amused. "You know, you're a perfectly fantastic little guy. I am in Mexico, am I not? You speak as if we were sitting in the heart of Tokyo."

"In Mexico, everything is *políticos*, Prescott. I have been here twelve years. I am married to the daughter of Senator Castillo. Senator Castillo exercises considerable power hereabouts. He is a close friend of the president. *Ergo*, I exercise great power hereabouts myself. In a manner of speaking, I am a powerful *político* here. I can have you arrested easily, exported even more easily. It is something you Americans do not understand, Prescott. We Japanese, and the Germans too, understand these people. We do not come in like imperialists and throw our money around and live behind barricades in a colony and look upon them as an inferior race. We treat them as equals; we intermingle; we intermarry; we take a place in the life of the community. You cannot buy friendship of these other American peoples. They will take your money, but you will still be *Yanqui* imperialists, and they will hate you as long as you call them natives. You may pass this information on to your Mr. Hull and Mr. Rockefeller."

"Forgive me," Mitchell said. "It is very hot in Del Norte. Across the border, it is much hotter. I fear I will be unable to carry the message to Judge Hull."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Sangamo. "I think this will be all for tonight. Tomorrow I will call you and arrange a meeting. You wish a job; no doubt, you wish to earn money. I think I may be of use to you in that respect. But one thing—you are a patriot?"

"Yes," Mitch said, "I am a patriot. All men are patriots. Up to a certain sum of money."

"That is very, very good," said Mr. Sangamo. "I am interested to know if you are capable of handling a boat by yourself."

"If the controls are all on the bridge, yes. I couldn't run down to the engine-room and up to the bridge all by myself."

"The controls are all centralized," Mr. Sangamo said. "We will talk of this tomorrow. You will remain in Mexico for some time?"

"That depends on three things. The señoritas, yourself, and money. And the greatest of these is money."

"Then I will say good evening, Mr. Prescott San. Tomorrow we will speak of money. I am sure we are going to get along so very well."

"*Un momento*," said Mitch. "What assurance have I, yet, that you won't turn me in?"

Mr. Sangamo said: "If you will use your eyes you will find Mr. Koji and Mr. Sato sitting in this room, watching your every move, and I had only to drop my cane and they would have shot you on the spot—with perfect immunity, since you are a wanted criminal. Now I think we understand each other, eh? Good evening."

"The first round is yours," Mitch said. "I have found a smarter man than I am, Gunga Din. Good evening, Itch."

"*Komban wa*, Prescott."

"Don't take any wooden nickels."

"I assure you," Mr. Sangamo said quietly, "I am extremely careful about such things." He walked out of the café, and Mitch scanned the place to find the two footpads, but he couldn't locate them. He finally finished his dinner, paid the check and rose from the table. At the same time, Willie Cheng, of Hollywood, came along and not watching where he was going, bumped into him.

"Hey!" Mitch growled.

"Sorry, so sorry," Mr. Cheng said. "Terribly sorry, old boy. All my fault. Didn't see you." He shook hands and went on his way, but he left a piece of paper in Mitch's palm. It read: "*The Orca, half an hour.*"

Mitchell Prescott went into the lobby of the Casa Grande and entered an elevator. There were some others in the elevator too. Mitch got off at the third floor, then ran down the stairs to the lobby again. Remaining inconspicuous, he watched the elevator bank, saw Mr. Koji and Mr. Sato awaiting the elevator. When the doors opened they hastily questioned the elevator boy. They leaped in, the doors closed, the elevator ascended. Mitch took a long breath and walked out of the hotel gingerly.

CHAPTER THREE



HE *Orca* was a charter boat. She was not tied up at the Mudhole slips, but farther south at the Municipal Pier, where all the boats for hire were located. She was a thirty-eight-foot cabin cruiser with a dual set of controls on her cabin top, and she had a fishing pulpit forward, for harpooning, which gave her a prolonged sleek look. She was painted jet black, with mahogany upper works and dark green boot-tops. After a glance to ascertain that he had not been spotted, Mitch stepped quickly into the cockpit—to come face to face with the business end of a .30-30 rifle, held by a wry-faced man with a cool mouth and a quid of tobacco perched in his left cheek.

"Wouldn't come any further," he said briefly. "Got soft-nose slugs in this peanut whistle. For sharks."

Mitch stopped short. He said quickly: "Look at my back. No dorsal fin. My name is Mitchell Prescott."

"Who sent you here?"

"Willie Cheng."

"Step inside the cabin and sit down and don't turn on a light. We've been expecting you."

Mitch went past him into the darkness of the cabin. The cabin's port side had a small table with leather seats on either side of it, in the manner of a dining-car. The starboard had a leather couch. He took the couch and stretched out on it. He said: "That was quite a jolt, running into that shark-gun. I didn't expect anyone."

"That was the idea."

"Who are you?"

"My handle's Porchuck. Captain Amos Porchuck. This here craft belongs to me."

Mitch smiled in the darkness. "But you wouldn't care to tell me who your charter-owner is, eh?"

"If you're Mitchell Prescott, you know who's chartered the boat. We expected you earlier in town."

"I couldn't show. I had to jump ship. That meant I had to lay low for awhile. I hired a *coche* and went up into the hills until I saw the ship up anchor. Then I came back. How much do you know?"

"Don't know nothing," said Captain Porchuck. "I take my orders from Willie and that's that. Some one is coming, so be quiet."

A slight figure came along the pier, on the verge of running, yet managing to stride. When it reached the *Orca*, they had no doubt. It was Cheng. He stepped down gingerly onto the transom and hopped into the cockpit.

"Willie?"

"In the flesh, Cappy. Did the big boy arrive?"

"In the cabin. I'll sit out here with Bessie and keep the flies off your back."

William Cheng stepped into the cabin and found a place on the sofa by Mitch's knees. "Hello, cookie," he said softly. "Solid sending. Very solid sending. I'm glad to see you. I guess it's okay."

There was moonlight on Willie Cheng's face, and Mitch smiled at him. It seemed queer to see Willie there. You got used to seeing the black-haired round-faced young Chinese on the screen, until he no longer was real.

"Hi, Willie," Mitch said. "Yes, I guess it's okay. I guess it worked. You never can tell with a Jap. Particularly Sangamo. But I think it worked. He didn't waste any time."

"He knew who you were?"

"He gave me the John Mitchell business, so he must have been into my luggage. He must have found all the stuff I had planted there. That was a good steer you gave me on Alvarez. The only thing that had bothered me was meeting this Sangamo in a logical way. That is, having him come after me. If I'd gone after him, he'd have been suspicious. So when you said Alvarez would sell me out in a moment, you said right. I let him blackmail me, and he called the boss right away, and Sangamo put a couple of killers on me."

"Golly," Cheng said. "You were chummy as hell with him when I saw you."

"We are old friends who distrust each other completely."

"Just let me tell you one thing, cookie, Sangamo is a bird. If it comes to a showdown, if everything blows up, you do the shooting first—because he won't hesitate. It's certainly not tiddlywinks. Those guys gave me a thorough going-over. My baggage was searched. I was very neatly pumped, but I guess they thought I was harmless. Still, I don't know. The whole point in my coming was to provide you with a guy to handle communications. I don't think I can kid around, Mitch. I'm afraid to telephone; I couldn't send any wire but the simplest 'Having a wonderful time.' I have been followed."

"My, my," Mitch said. "Has the big brave cheer-leader got his wind up?"

"Oh, golly," Cheng groaned, "are you going to bring that up again? So what if I was cheer-leader? There are worse things than that. Vice-President of the United States, for instance."

"How long have you been here?"

"Four days. Cappy Porchuck was here a week before. I arranged for him to come down earlier. Then I checked in at Casa Grande last Thursday and proceeded to play-boy my time in the best Hollywood tradition. Went fishing—me who hates the *deportes*—and I had to wind up with a three-hundred-pound broadbill. I couldn't lose him either."

"Never mind the fishing," Mitch said. "What is the dope on the needle in the haystack? Have you located Howard Shaw?"

"I have not. Not a hide or hair."

"The local morgue?"

Willie Cheng pushed his hat back on his head. "Ay, yah! Will you give me one good reason a movie actor could use for sightseeing in a morgue on vacation? They'd have been wise to me the second I went to take a gander at the corpses."

"You're a big help," Mitch said dryly. "I'll check on the morgue. But I'm sure Shaw is alive."

"Who was he, anyhow?"

"My God, don't you know anything but telephone numbers of Hollywood dames? Howard Shaw is the greatest electronic engineer of our time. He was a pioneer in television and frequency modulation, and it's Shaw who developed ultra high-frequency communication for Army aircraft. He built one of the first vacuum tubes. He's done everything important in radio. And you've never heard of him!"

CHENG shook his head. "Never heard of anything until I got tapped for your pleasant little sorority and gave up autographs for intrigue. Incidentally, I got recognized by a couple of gals—veddy elegant dishes—and had to sign a couple of autographs. I guess they don't get a movie star in this dump all the time."

"A movie star!" Mitch scoffed.

"Sure. I don't impress you enough. I'm a famous guy. I've made fifty-four pictures before you and your boss appealed to my patriotic weakness and got me in this dish of boiling oil. Yes, sir, the cinema is much safer. I'll be glad to get back to the Tinsel Town—if ever."

"For God's sake!" said Mitch mildly. "All right, we admit Willie Cheng is the boy wonder, the new Sessue Hayakawa—"

"He was a Jap. Don't be insulting."

"—but what I really want to know is, did you accomplish anything at all in Del Norte?"

Willie Cheng lit a cigarette. The match disclosed the bright sport-jacket, gay tie with overlarge knot, and a Phi Beta key dangling from his plaid sport vest. He looked fresh out of college. Actually he was thirty. He had a free easy smile. "First," he said, "we will take up Ichiro Sangamo. He is a figure in this burg. Rich, well found. He owns a firm called the Geisha Tuna Company. They can tuna meat. Right down there on the waterfront, between the old and the new *ciudad*. Boy, am I not hot at this Spanish! It's a brick place, and it looks kind of good. They *do* can tuna. I was taken through it with a tour of gapers. But right next door is the Tortugas Boat Works. Boat repairs and boat building. That I couldn't get into. The front doors are closed; the windows are opaque; and there are always a couple of guards out in front. No way to break into the place except on the other side, the sea side. The peculiar thing about the Tortugas Boat Works is that the only boats it seems to work on are Sangamo's sampans. Sangamo has five that I've counted. Cappy Porchuck and I did a little scouting one night—this Orca

isn't black-hulled for no reason—and we counted five at the Tortugas docks. There used to be six. One blew up."

Mitch sat up. "One did what?" he said coldly.

"Blew up. It exploded and sank."

"Did you see that happen?"

"No. It happened before I came down," Willie Cheng said. "Cappy Porchuck saw it, though. Anyone can see the remains. The mast and the crow's-nest are sticking up above water. She blew up on the Mosquito Bank over on the north side of the harbor where there are shallows. She's lying in thirty feet of water."

"H'm!" said Mitch. "You sit outside. I want to talk to the captain."

"Okay, cookie. I'll send him in."

Cheng took the rifle from Captain Porchuck and sent him inside. Porchuck had a game leg, and limped slightly. His joints creaked audibly. He was puffing a corn-cob pipe, and it smelled good. He took a seat in the cabin and leaned back. "Yes sir?" he said politely.

"Captain, Willie told me about the Sangamo sampan that blew up. Did you see it happen?"

"I did that."

"Tell me about it."

"Aint much to tell," Captain Porchuck said. "Although it wasn't an orthodox kind of fire. It was a mighty queer fire. Looked like a smoke-pot. This sampan—her name was *Tara*—she left the docks at the Geisha place and started for the strait. She was moving pretty slow. It was just dusk, and the light was bad. Well, I'd been keeping my glimmers on them sampans like Willie told me to, so I was watching. I remember, there was an airplane over the bay, a silver metal plane that was making big circles up in the air, over this sampan. All of a sudden the sampan cut away from the strait and went north up to the shallow end of the bay, about two miles away from the city. Then she started to smoke. The smoke was heavy and thick, and there was so much of it, I wasn't inclined to believe it was real. I put the binoculars on her, and I saw two men—Japs—leave her in a powerboat; and they came back, wide open; when they were safe away, she blew up."

Mitch nodded. "You're thinking it was a time bomb."

"Well, I aint saying so, but it did seem mighty convenient, the way that craft waited for those two lubbers to get safely out of shooting-distance before she busted her seams open and sank."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," Mitch said.

"For the insurance, maybe," Captain Porchuck said.

Mitch shook his head. "No—not for the insurance. I'd like to know about the plane. What did it look like?"

"Just a plane. Mighty sleek job. A monoplane with the wing under the fuselage," said Captain Porchuck. "Doggone fast ship—she was scooting all around the sky. Mind you, she was never right over the sampan, in case you're thinking the plane bombed the boat. It wasn't nothing like that. She made quite a racket, though. About a thousand feet."

"Where did this metal job go after the explosion?"

"Home, I guess. Mighty fast."

"And there was nothing else—no other planes?"

"Well now, there was another plane, but rightly speaking, she wasn't concerned in it. She was too far away."

Mitch asked: "How far?"

Captain Porchuck scratched his chin and took the pipe out of his mouth. "It was doggone queer light, that time of day. Hard to say. But her outline was awful small, Prescott. Awful small. I only saw her when she came up over Mt. Tepic and was against the sky for a second. Then she disappeared down against the mountain darkness."

"On which side? This side, over Del Norte's harbor, or the other side of Tepic, over the ocean?"

"She couldn't have been this side of the mountain, or I'd have heard her engine, and really seen her big. Tepic is only six miles away as the crow flies. She was very small, so she must have been on the other side of the mountain."

"You saw this second ship just once, before the sampan blew up, never after?"

"Just that once, above the mountain."

"Okay," said Mitch. "You're a good man, Amos."

"Don't call me Amos," Captain Porchuck said. "Folks call me Amos, and everybody wants to know where Andy is. I'm getting sick of the joke."

"Okay, Captain. Nice work. Keep watching. You've been a help."

"A man does what he can," Captain Porchuck said. "Don't seem hardly enough, these days."

Mitch shook hands with him and got up. They went out into the cockpit. The pier was deserted. Willie Cheng was tinkering with the rifle. He said: "This is some gun, Mitch. Cappy blew a shark right out of the water yesterday with a dum dum. She shoots where you aim her."

"Never mind the gun," Mitch said. "Just get this: I've got to report to H.Q. in San Diego tomorrow night at eight o'clock. You meet me with your car at the side exit of El Sol Cine on Calle Oceano. I'll shake any tailers and slip out the side, then drive for Mt. Tepic. Have you got that?"

"Yowzuh. Listen—what happens if we don't find Shaw?"

"If we don't find Shaw, the west coast of the United States is going to see a string of disasters that even lobster and ice-cream couldn't dream up. If the thing gets away from us, Willie, there won't be any way of preventing the most deadly kind of sabotage you ever saw. . . . And don't be followed tonight."

"I won't," Cheng said. "Does that conclude the evening's business?"

"Not quite. Where is the airport for this burg?"

"I don't know."

"All right, then, that's that."

"Alone at last," Willie Cheng said with a sigh. "Now I can go to the movies and see myself on the screen."

Mitch said dryly: "Del Norte is an old city, but not old enough to be running one of your pictures." He stepped on the transom. "I'll be seeing you at seven-thirty tomorrow night."

"Okay, you nasty man. And which lovely are you after right now? I can tell by the gleam in your eyes."

"Polly Merritt."

"Nothing but the best for Prescott, eh? Nice going. You like brunettes, don't you? Oh, these playgirls!"

"Polly Merritt," said Mitchell Prescott, "is hardly a playgirl, my lad. Don't take any *mook ts'een*."

Cheng laughed. "And you were jeering at my Cantonese! Good night, Mitch. See you in the local mortuary."

CHAPTER FOUR



It was a fine night. The stars looked close enough to touch, and although it was growing late, the moon was still up there, still taking away the completeness of the dark. Casa Grande was somewhat like Gibraltar. The rest of Del Norte had gone dark, but there was the great white stucco hotel, its facade emblazoned with light, standing out in contrast to its backdrop of jet black precipitous mountains. Mitchell Prescott walked to the hotel, entered the lobby and telephoned Polly Merritt from the desk. There was no answer. The clerk said: "I think Señorita Merritt is in the Lido with a gentleman, señor."

"The Lido?" Mitch said. "What is the Lido? I was in the Café Americano myself earlier, but I didn't hear it called the Lido."

"No, señor, they are not the same. The Lido is on the mezzanine terraces, in the open. The café is only for dining. The Lido is for dining and dancing at night. We have a very excellent jazz band—no *mariachis*—this is an American band. Take the elevator to the mezzanine."

As Mitch turned, he caught a glimpse of Nobuo Sato, the tall, lean one. Sato must have been waiting for him to show. Sato looked incomparably relieved because he had picked up the trail again. Mitch stared at him hard. You never could tell what was behind the eyes of those guys. Some were dumb; some were smart. They all looked alike. He wanted to go over and say, "Look, Yellow Peril, I get claustrophobia easily. Stop crowding me." It was a little nerve-racking to have a guy sitting on you all the time. But he said nothing and took the elevator up to the Lido.

The Lido was out under the stars. There was a provision made for rain, for the iron work overhead could be easily covered with canvas; but this night it was rolled back, and the stars made a roof. The terraces were liberally speckled with bright and multi-colored Japanese lanterns which bobbed nervously like moths in the slight wind off the sea. The head waiter escorted Mitch to a table for two remotely located from the dance floor, where he sat alone. Presently a young and rather artificially pretty hostess sauntered by and asked if she might join him. "No thanks," Mitch said. "Not tonight, dear. I'm not going to be here long."

"My hard luck, handsome."

"On the contrary."

He ordered *café con leche* and idly examined the dance floor. It was an excellent band, and it was pleasant to hear music again, after listening to a squealing unshielded four-tube radio in the crew's quarters of the ship *Steel Maiden*. He found Polly Merritt on the dance floor with a trimly built blond fellow who was handsome, lithe and a good dancer. The way he handled his feet, Mitch put him down for a boxer, but the face was too neat for a boxer's. There was no sign of aggression anywhere on the face. Even the best get marked up a little. It was very good to see all the swank and the glitter. The Lido was thickly populated, the dance floor taxed to its capacity, and there were glittering strapless gowns and beautiful women. The women were not citizens of Del Norte. They were all foreigners, down for the tour or the hell of it. It occurred to Mitchell that there was no point in coming down to Del Norte to see Mexico. It was not Mexico at all.

When the music finished, he followed Polly Merritt and her escort across the floor and saw them sit down at a table where there were two other men, one of them Al Roche, the producer, the other unknown to him. He pushed right through to the table and called boldly: "Polly! Polly Merritt! Coronado Beach in person. What a break for good old Mitch!"

She turned, as they all did, and she looked at him sharply, instantly worried. Suspicion darkened her soft eyes.

"Polly Merritt," Mitch said dreamily. He grinned. "A sight for sore eyes. Last time I saw you in Coronado—wait a minute, maybe it was in Fresno—don't you remember me? Mitchell Prescott."

She looked swiftly puzzled, frightened and resigned, and then she smiled, extended her hand and said: "Mitch! Of course! It's been so long I'd nearly forgotten. Awfully nice to see you. Won't you sit down and join us? I suppose you're down here for the swordfishing?"

The blond fellow called a waiter. "Another chair for the old friend." He grinned. "I'm Adams." They shook hands.

"John Quincy?" Mitch said.

"Just plain Dave, thanks."

The third man had risen and stood politely with a faint supercilious smile on his lips. He had a long uneven face, difficult to remember, with gimlet eyes, remote and dark, and a strong jaw-line. He had the bearing of a military man, somehow, and his hair was cut rather short over the ears in a Prussian manner. His left brow arched naturally, his right descending in opposite manner, so that he had a Mephistophelean aspect, all his own. Polly said: "Baron Ernest Falkhorst, Mr. Prescott."

"My pleasure, Herr Prescott," Baron Falkhorst said crisply, bowing stiffly.

"You're a long way from home, Baron," Mitch said.

"On the contrary, I am home," the Baron said. "With me it is a question of home being where I hang my hat. Breslau is cut off from me until the Nazi terror will have run its course. In other words, Herr Prescott, I am a refugee. There are many of us in these days, *nicht wahr?*"

"Quite a few."

"But all are not as lucky as I, to be sitting here in Del Norte tonight with the most beautiful girl in the State of California."

"Why qualify it?" David Adams said. "Most beautiful girl in the world, for my money."

The Baron laughed. "But you are in love, and I am a married man, Herr Adams. So I needs must qualify it."

"And this is Mr. Roche," Polly Merritt said.

"Hello, Al," said Mitch.

AL ROCHE waved a cigar—an epic cigar, too long and large for his little mouth, for he was a slight ferret-faced man with a crooked nose, bright shrewd eyes and a small jaw with an incredibly strong line. He held the gravity-defying cigar at an angle and he looked surprised. "You know me?" he said.

"Everybody knows Al Roche," Mitch said. "You're the guy who made 'Polynesian Shadows,' which, they say, will never be topped."

"Well," Al Roche said expansively, "we got a bright boy here. What did you say your name was?"

"Mitchell Prescott."

"Well, Mitch, you got to can these compliments. That's why I'm down here. A dope named Hollister, who is my butcher, told me that maybe I was getting something wrong with me from smoking too many cigars and drinking too much and being yessed to death. Al, he says, you run down to Del Norte and grab yourself some swordfish and sunshine and try and find some rat who'll say no to you. You keep on like *this*, and you'll wind up creating heaven and earth in seven days!" He flicked ashes from the cigar and laughed at his own joke. "So I'm recuperating. Not a yes-man in the joint. I should live so long."

Mitch observed: "Seems like you might find talent down here, or maybe a good locale for a movie."

"I thought the same thing," Al said. "It's n.g. Sure, it's a nice set-up for a movie, nice place, good scenery. In Technicolor it would be good. But what kind of a yarn could you lay here? My God, it's deader than a Francis-X.-Bushman-Beverly-Bayne epic. Nothing ever happens. You go fishing, and maybe you catch one, and all day you're in the sun, so you get sleepy as hell come ten o'clock. If the butcher says I aint allowed to drink, how do I stay awake? As for talent, there aint any talent in Mexico! The women don't have proper figures; they don't know how to act; they sing too hard and they talk too soft; there aint any original music; it's all American and bad American, and have you ever heard a *mariachi?*"

"Sure, but a man like Al Roche could find talent where there was only tarnish."

Al Roche grinned. "Listen to this guy! He reads like one of my own ads. But the place is dead. I honestly was figuring maybe we could do a story down here. But what the hell, you can't make a colossal out of a swordfish jaunt. People come, people go, nothing ever happens."

The music had started again. Mitch said, "May I have this dance, Polly?"

"Look here," said Adams, "I give you fair warning, Prescott, that this fair flower is the only reason I'm hanging on at this hovel. I've caught enough fish and spent enough money, and I'm overdue in San Francisco, so please don't renew the friendship with undue ardor. I'm trying to persuade Polly to accompany me home."

"Well, I'm only human too," Mitch said. "I couldn't renew the friendship with anything less than undue ardor."

Baron Falkhorst said: "You Americans are a nation of rogues!"

"Germany aint doing so bad on that score either," Al Roche said undiplomatically. "When it comes to rats, you got more in Berlin than I got in Hollywood, and that is something!"

Mitch danced off with the girl. When they were at a discreet distance from the table, she whispered: "Please don't hold me so tightly."

"Didn't know I was," he said. "Instinctive, I guess. You dance divinely. Or are you supposed to say that to me? No matter."

"Please," Polly said, "who are you?"

"You don't remember good old Mitch?"

"I never saw you before in my life, and you know it."

"Why didn't you cut me dead, then?"

She hesitated and bit her lip. "I didn't want to be rude."

"Uh-huh."

"I should have."

He said bluntly: "You were afraid to."

Polly flashed her eyes at him. For blue eyes, they had a lot of fire in them. "Why should I be afraid of you?"

"Because I know you're from Fresno, not Coronado. And I know that your real name isn't Merritt. It's—"

She put her hand over his mouth, looking frightened. She was shivering and trembling as if he had struck her. Her feet began to make mistakes, and she paled.

"Look here," Mitch cautioned gently, "what do you think your argus-eyed friends are going to think? A pretty smile, my sweet, and gentle eyes for the old, old friend. You're a very pretty girl. How's about plighting a troth with me sometime when a body can plight a troth with a little peace of mind?"

"Please, Mitch, I don't know who you are or what you are—but don't bait me this way—"

"Take it easy, baby. I'll explain. I know why you are here. I have a file on you, and some pictures. They don't do you justice. . . . You're here to find your father. I am too. . . . You do dance like an angel. . . . Have you got a line on him at all?"

"I can't talk to you here—now! How can I trust you?"

"I haven't informed anybody as to your real name, have I? I haven't told anyone you're Polly Shaw, have I? That ought to inspire a little trust."

"Yes," she said. "I've been so alone, terrified—"

"Smile, baby."

She smiled at him. "I don't like you," she said sweetly. "You're cold, efficient and cruel."

"I have a heart of gold. The face you were wearing would have tipped off a guy as thick as Al Roche. Now listen: I'll telephone you and make a date with you when it's safe. I want to talk to you. You aren't to tell a soul of this conversation. I'm trusting you with a lot. My life, in fact. Don't forget that and get silly."

"Is your name really Prescott?"

"It is."

The music ended, and they returned to the table through the crowd. Mitchell found a cold hard knot in the pit of his stomach. He had seen Mr. Ichiro Sangamo at the table. Itch had joined the party. Baron Falkhorst rose and said: "Herr Prescott, may I introduce—"

"We've met," Mitch said.

"Yes," said Mr. Sangamo. "Good evening, Mitchell. You have been dancing with the loveliest lady in Del Norte."

"Old friends," Adams said. He sighed. "That's how it always is with me. Old friends are a hoodoo. Just when I'm going good with a girl, along comes one of these old friends, and carries off the maiden. Look at me. Twenty-six, and I'm a wizened old bachelor, all on account of old friends."

Mr. Sangamo sucked in his breath and smiled. "Oh, but you should not let Mitchell tease you, Mr. Adams. They are hardly old friends. Only this evening he pointed

Miss Merritt out and asked me who she was, so it is hardly possible he could offer you competition from things past."

"That's telling tales out of school," Mitch said heavily. "Oh?" Mr. Sangamo looked amazed. "So very sorry. Forgive me, Mitchell."

"Polly!" Adams said. "But you said you knew him—" "As a matter of fact, she didn't know me," Mitch said. He smiled disarmingly. "But she didn't want to be rude. Anyway, the heinous deed is done. I came, I saw, I hankered; I told myself I would meet this girl or die trying."

"Yes," Mr. Sangamo said, benevolently sinister. "It is fortunate you did not die trying. That would have been a pity, Mitchell!"

CHAPTER FIVE



MITCH did not prolong his stay at the Casa Grande after Mr. Sangamo's arrival. He did not feel too happy about that. All the way back to Calle Violeta, he thought: "The little Nipper is wise; I've rushed the thing too much." Still, he wasn't sure. There was no

way of being sure until some one tried to kill him. Then he would know that Mr. Sangamo was indeed clever and not just cryptic.

In the rear of the lobby of the Casa Cervantes, beyond the worn rugs and the neat wicker furniture, there was a telephone switchboard, with a señorita at it, and she was just getting ready to close it up for the night. It was not much of a switchboard, for the hotel was small. But it was quite a señorita. She had a handsome face, very photogenic, with high cheekbones and a voluptuous mouth which displayed her white teeth in a ready smile. Her hair and eyes were dark, her fingernails lacquered in the North and South American way. She glanced up at Mitch with frank coquetry.

"Well," he said, "Doña Maria said nothing about the hermosa señorita at the switchboard. *Quien es?*"

"Dolores."

"Dolores—a lovely handle for a lovely bundle. What are you doing in this ancient hotel, my dove?"

"I am the sister of Miguel," she replied.

"Oh," he said. "Casa Cervantes is a closed affair, eh?"

"Sí, señor," she smilingly agreed.

"You probably have other brothers and sisters to handle the rest of the hard labor around the joint. It is no doubt a family of immensity."

"Sí, señor," she laughed. "I have many brothers, many sisters, a mother, but no papa. I do something for you, no?"

"Yes, you do something for me. You geeve me big smile and you telephone the Port Authority in Del Norte, eh?"

"*Con mucho gusto, Señor Prescott.*"

"You are a very fine doll."

"You are a long tongue who do not mean what he say."

"So help me," Mitch said, "I didn't know they made them like you in Baja California. Put the call through, baby. *Buenas noches.*"

He went up to his room, figuring the call. It seemed a smart thing to do. Mr. Sangamo would certainly have the room wired for sound, so it would be characteristic of him to be laying plans to get out of the burg. That might help to take the curse off the fact that he had been seen with Polly Merritt. He must know who she really was, Mitch decided, or he wouldn't have got so smoky.

The telephone rang. Dolores said: "We are ready, señor."

"Hello?"

"This is the Port Authority," a voice said in Spanish.

"Good," Mitch said. "I want a ship. Any ship as long as it isn't American, going any place that isn't American. South Seas, the Orient, China, Japan. I have the wanderlust. When does one leave?"

"That is too bad," said the voice. "There is no ship. The *Steel Maiden* left for Capetown earlier tonight."

"She is American."

"No, no, she flies a Panama flag."

"Same difference. No ship?"

"No ship. Of course, there is the *Nichyo Maru*, but she will not sail for three days. She only arrives tomorrow noon. She is a tanker, and she will sail for Yokohama. They might accept a passenger. You should visit the Nippon Yusen Kaisha *oficina de billetes.*"

"*Gracias,*" Mitch said, and hung up hurriedly. He hoped it had sounded good. He didn't have a passport, so he would hardly visit a ticket office. Sangamo would know this. For curiosity's sake, Mitch began to search the room. It did not take long to locate the microphone. They had planted it above the phone-box behind the writing-desk. It was a single-button carbon microphone of high gain, which undoubtedly picked up any sound in the room, providing they had a decent amplifier at the other end of the shielded cable. He did not disturb it. He left it there and examined his luggage.

Mr. Koji and Mr. Sato had been extremely careful to replace everything in his two bags almost exactly the way he had left it, but not quite. He could see that things had been disturbed. He found the leather pouch in which he had an automatic (besides the gun on his hip), and several other trinkets including a small autograph album which held newspaper clippings instead of autographs. He flipped it open and stared at the newspaper clippings. One said, "G-MAN SLAIN IN AMBUSH DURING RAID ON SEY NEST." The details followed. Another later clipping said, "JOHN MITCHELL SOUGHT BY F.B.I. AS SLAYER IN SPECIAL AGENT'S DEATH." The details followed again. Another: "FINGERPRINTS ON MURDER GUN POINT TO MITCHELL, FORMER GUN-RUNNER, AS MURDERER OF G-MAN EVANS." And more of them, some announcing the capture of Mitchell in Arizona, others denying the identity of the captured man, others with wild clues as to his whereabouts. Twenty in all—two to four months old. They petered out unsensationally.

Also in the pouch was a gun permit for Los Angeles with a picture of John Mitchell on it. The face was the face of Mitchell Prescott. There was similar trivia, a driving-license with his own description. . . . It had all been prepared and aged and framed with the greatest of care just for the venture. It was all a lie, but it looked very good, and Mitch wondered himself what kind of a job it would be to actually prove to some one in Del Norte that he was not John Mitchell, that John Mitchell was only an *homme de guerre*, with a *nom de guerre*. It would have been exceedingly difficult and very embarrassing. The frame had been executed to perfection. . . .

He took one last look down at Nobuo Sato watching his room, and he wondered vaguely where the other jaundiced bloodhound was, the plump Koji. At the back door, most likely. He restrained himself from blowing Sato a kiss, then turned down the light and hit the hay, placing his revolver under his pillow. But this gesture was only perfunctory. He intended to sleep soundly. They were not ready to murder him yet. The microphone testified to that.

The dawn was delayed. A hard gray rain drove in from the northwest and visibility was very poor. The false darkness tricked Mitch and he slept late. The ringing of the telephone awakened him and he grabbed the instrument in a panicky way to stop its awful sound. "Yes?"

"Mitchell?"

"Well," Mitch said, awake instantly, "good morning to you, Sangamo San, and is it not a lovely day for our little web-footed feathered friends?"

"Good morning, Mitchell," said Mr. Sangamo politely. "I trust your first night was a peaceful one? Del Norte is a quiet place after dark. I myself was bothered with insomnia until I came here to live. I have never been bothered with it since."

"I always sleep," Mitch replied, "soundly. A dream in my head, a gun in my hand, a hot-water bottle at my feet." He coughed. "Still mad at me?"

Mr. Sangamo sucked in his breath and said nothing for a moment. Mitch chuckled grimly to himself. Sangamo did not like losing face to the American, but he had it coming to him.

"I do not know what you mean, Mitchell," Mr. Sangamo said lamely.

"Listen, Itch," Mitchell said: "I didn't ask myself in on any of this. I was just a guy taking the long, long trail a-winding. You spoke to me first. You made me a veiled offer of a job. Then you put two sweethearts on me. If you're worried about me, forget it. I'll be leaving pretty soon."

"Why should I be worried about you?" Sangamo asked quietly. "What cause have I to be worried about anyone?"

"Shall I tell you on the telephone?"

"That isn't necessary," Sangamo said quickly. My, my, he was all friendly again. "I called to ask if you would join me for luncheon, at one o'clock today. There are some things we might discuss. Or do you have a previous engagement?"

"Oh, yes," Mitch said dryly. "The President of Mexico wanted me to fly down to Mexico City and talk over the stability of the peso with him, but I can break that. And where does this bread-breaking transpire, Itch?"

"At Ciutti's restaurant, shall we say. A very quiet and pleasant eating-place in the old city, on the waterfront. Not far from the Grace Line pier."

"I'll find it," Mitch said. "At one o'clock."

"Excellent," said Mr. Sangamo. "Good morning."

Mitch hung up. He rolled back into bed in comfort and then looked out the window, northwest where Mount Tepic had hidden her peak in a cloud of rain. It was quite a day, granite and chilly. But the visibility had improved somewhat, the scud blowing out before the wind, and he could see from the Boca de Lobo in to the waterfront, the white caps churning the bay. There was a low-lying sampan outward-bound, making white water at her bow and rolling weirdly. In the bay, a small coastal steamer, the *Viczaya*, tugged at her anchor, her head pointing into the wind. Mitch stared and wondered if the sampan belonged to Ichiro Sangamo. It occurred to him that the Japanese tanker *Nichyo Maru* was due for arrival, and that the sampan might be going out to meet it. But outside the sea was rough. With some satisfaction, he realized that it would be nearly impossible to transfer any sort of cargo from the *Nichyo Maru* to a sampan in that kind of water, even with the sampan in the lee.

He hastily scribbled a note to Willie Cheng in Chinese. He wrote: "Accidentally on purpose, run into the *Nichyo Maru* somewhere outside. Due here at noon. You should find her. Just watch her." He did not sign it.

THERE was a knock on the door and Mitch said, "Come in." Miguel Cervantes came in, dressed in his neat dark trousers and his white serving-coat.

"The señor will have breakfast?"

"Absolutely," said Mitch. "I leave the selection to your own imagination, Miguel, *amigo*."

"I wish to have a personal word with you, señor," Miguel said.

Mitch got out of bed and unscrewed the ground-wire on the microphone, using his thumbnail. Satisfied that the mike was making no circuit, he returned to the bed and reposed there again, smiling.

"You may proceed, *viejo*."

Miguel was very sober, and his face was tight. He stared at the exposed microphone, and he said: "The two men who follow you?"

"But yes. Think nothing of it." Mitch pointed at the chair. "Have a seat and pour out your heart. It is a woman, of course."

Miguel did not laugh. "I wish to ask a favor of you, Señor Prescott. You have seen my sister Dolores?"

"I have looked upon her and found her good," Mitch said.

"*Bueno*." Miguel set his mouth. "Because I wish you to make love to her, señor. I wish you to turn my sister's head. You do this favor for me? It is most urgent."

"Wait a minute," Mitch thought, "what have we here? Not enough trouble, but we have to have a local match-maker!" He sat slowly erect in the bed and smiled at Miguel disarmingly, and he said: "I'd be glad to do you such a favor, *amigo*. She is a pretty girl. I take it she is in love with someone you don't like. Along comes the rich American, and you use me to break up the romance, eh?"

"Yes, señor," Miguel said. "I beg of you!"

Mitch said slowly: "This is very interesting. You are a very interesting fellow, Miguel."

"You do not like me," Miguel said.

"I like you fine," Mitch said slowly. "I liked you better maybe before you started asking peculiar favors and saying many interesting things."

"You will do me the favor, señor?"

"Suppose I said no, Miguel."

Miguel's eyes flickered. His hands were clenched in his lap. "I hope you will not say no, señor."

"Why, Miguel?"

"Señor," Miguel said, his voice low, "if you do not do me the favor, I will have to kill a man."

"Not me, I hope?"

"No, señor," Miguel said. "You are joking me."

Mitch stretched and sat up. "I'm sorry," he said. "What's the trouble, eh, kiddo?"

"Señor, please, forgive me," Miguel said. "I do not want to make trouble. But I am desperate. You must help me, make Dolores forget this monkey. My mother is sad and sick over it. It is a disgrace to my family. My sister should be whipped."

Mitchell Prescott seemed not to have heard. He was examining Miguel in his mind, weighing the pros and the cons. There was a pleasant humility about Miguel that appealed to him.

"I'm not the most charming guy in the world," he said.

"You will do it?" Miguel rubbed his hands, much relieved. "You will, señor? But you are very charming, and already she has spoken of you as a rogue. I will tell her you are very rich. That is what she wants, richness. Señor, I am so grateful—"

"Skip all that," Mitch said, provoked at the kid's brightness. "I think you're pulling a fast one nevertheless. It's a free country, and a gal has the right to marry anyone she pleases."

"But *Dios mio*, señor, not a Fascist!"

"A Fascist?"

"Yes, that is so. His name is Juan Cortello. He is very rich. He has much money. He owns a camera and radio store on Calle Oceano."

"But after all," Mitch said ingenuously, watching the kid sharply, "if Dolores loves Juan instead of a gay young don with Socialist blood in his veins, what is that to you? Love knows no barrier, no race, no creed, no color. She might even marry a Japanese. The Japanese are a great little people. In Japan, of course."

"Sneak-sneak-sneak!" said Miguel. "Like yellow spiders! Make all the money, sneak around all the time, taking pictures, watching you, sneaking some more. I hate them! But better Dolores should marry a fat yellow bug, than a Fascist. My father was a *politico* in Guadalajara, and he was murdered by a Falangist. Better a spying Japanese!"

"Well, now," said Mitch, "the Japanese are a race of amateur spies. Any time you find a Japanese away from Nippon, you know at once he is a spy. That isn't my opinion; that is a fact. I once spoke with a Japanese naval officer about that, and he told me that the government an-

nally receives thousands of unsolicited notebooks, photos, maps and sundry documents from its nationals abroad. Fancy that! It seems to be inherent in the Japanese character, that lack of trust in anyone. When I was in Manila, I used to watch the Jap fishermen—who had throttled the fishing business about as completely as the Japs in Del Norte manage to control everything—sounding Manila Bay from end to end. They didn't trust the U. S. Coast & Geodetic Survey charts! They had to sound it for themselves. It was a standing joke."

"Not funny," said Miguel. "You will help me, señor?" Mitch shrugged. "Okay—I'll make passes at your sister. Because I don't like Falangists either. I'm not responsible for the way it winds up. But you do *me* a favor too—you deliver this letter to William Cheng at Casa Grande."

Miguel nodded again. He took the letter for Willie Cheng. He said quietly: "*Gracias*, señor. Forgive me." He went out and closed the door.

CHAPTER SIX



OBUE SATO was alone again. Mitchell Prescott borrowed an umbrella from Doña Maria and walked to the waterfront. Sato followed. The rain had lost its drive and turned into a gray and dreary thing. It was too early for luncheon, so Mitch cut down the hill into the old city. Calle Oceano, down there, was not the modern highway as in the new city. It was narrow, cobbled and smelly, and there was no sea-wall. The old city was completely protected from the sea, situated in a small lobe behind the eastern peninsula of the dark green hills. All along the street there were grim and disheveled shacks and houses and storehouses. There were boats, small and large, all dirty, all kinds. It was obvious to Mitch that the boat people did not mingle much with the shore folk. They lived their lives aboard their boats, ashore only to unload the craft or to go to the markets or the cockfights or the bullfights. When he finally saw the Geisha Tuna Company, he stopped his walk and started back. He had only wanted to locate it. It was a fine brick building. The Tortugas Boat Works had its front all boarded up, its windows shuttered, no sign of life in it.

His shoes were pretty wet, but there was no sign of a *coche*—and it was taking your life in your hands to ride one anyhow. So he walked back up to the new city and paused atop the sea-wall for a view of the bay. The strait was invisible behind the rain. He watched and waited. Soon he saw the *Orca* outward-bound.

Ichiro Sangamo was waiting for him at Ciutti's. It was a clean and modern restaurant not far from the Casa Grande, and it was very crowded with Americans, because the rain had killed the day's fishing for most of them. Not that you couldn't fish in the rain, but it wasn't much fun, getting wetted down to the marrow.

Mr. Sangamo bowed and scraped politely, and made his protestations of delight at Mitchell San's presence. He was extremely courteous. They were escorted to a chrome-ringed, leather-cushioned cubicle, where they sat down. "Will you have a Japanese dinner, Mitchell?"

"No, thanks," Mitch grimaced. "Last time I had a Jap dinner, I got lost when it came to dissecting the bird with the sticks. I'll join you in a shot of hot *sake* if you wish. What, no geishas? No pretty geishas to keep us entertained when the conversation gets grim?"

"Need the conversation become grim?"

"It need not," said Mitch, "but it probably will."

"Why do you say so, Mitchell?" Mr. Sangamo asked carefully.

"Uh-uh," said Mitch. "Careful, Itch. That's facing an issue. It's not characteristic of your race."

Mr. Sangamo concealed his annoyance and lighted a cigarette. "As you know by the way I speak English, a

language exceedingly difficult for a Japanese to master, I am not exactly characteristic of my race. I have attempted to retain the hospitality for which my people have always been renowned, but—"

"You have also retained the complete distrust with which they regard the western world."

"I am very careful," Mr. Sangamo said. "I am not partial to mistakes. They cause unhappiness. Sometimes they cause death. . . . On the telephone you said that I was worried about you. I repeat the question I put to you then, Mitchell. Why should I be worried about you?"

"Because," Mitch said, "you are a Japanese spy."

Mr. Sangamo puffed on his cigarette. He did a good job of poker-facing it. "It is so ridiculous. You Americans think any Japanese is a spy."

"Any Japanese patriot is," said Mitch. "Your whole purpose in settling here has been to lay a groundwork for espionage and agenting. I might emphasize that espionage possibly passes through your hands, but the business of being an intelligence agent is no doubt your first pre-occupation."

"In such a case, why should I concern myself with you?"

Mitch shrugged. "Because I happen to be a renegade on the lam."

"Eat," said Mr. Sangamo.

They ate silently; not a word passed between them. When they had finished, and lighted cigarettes, Mr. Sangamo said: "The mere fact that you killed a Federal officer in a raid, Mitchell, does not make you a renegade. A criminal perhaps, but not a renegade."

"You're marvelous," Mitch said. "You know so many things."

"It is a hobby. It might interest you to know that the search for you is growing very warm. They have, possibly, seized you in New York."

"I get it. An American newspaper. San Diego *Times*?"

Mr. Sangamo smiled. "Quite so."

"I'm not quick on the trigger, you must forgive me my stupidity in thinking you omniscient," Mitch said. The *sake* had arrived. He drank it slowly.

Mr. Sangamo asked quietly: "How much?"

"It depends upon the job."

"And if you get no job?"

"Then I blow. I'm down to fifty dollars. If I stay here, I'll waste it. I thought I could get a job in the fishing cruisers, but if the newspapers are riding me that hard, I've got to get out. There's a Japanese ship—but I suppose you know about that too?"

"Yes," said Mr. Sangamo. He smiled.

Mitch said grimly. "Look, Itch: you boys can beat around a bush longer than any race on earth. But the sands of time run low, and a man in my position doesn't have all the time in the world. Make a deal or forget me."

"Oh," said Mr. Sangamo blandly. "I have a job for you. If you do it correctly, I will pay you a thousand dollars."

"Mex?"

"American."

"That is very provocative," Mitch said.

"I am afraid it will disappoint you, Mitchell. It is the simple task of taking one of my sampans to sea. Alone."

Mitch was silent. He stared at Sangamo, frowning, and waited. Mr. Sangamo added nothing. Mitch said: "A grand for just taking a boat to sea? Where is the catch?"

"You are capable of taking her out alone?"

"Sure, I can do it alone. And bring her back too."

"Excellent. Shall we say five hundred when you leave Del Norte with her, and five hundred when you return?"

"We shall say," Mitch replied, "five hundred right now, and five hundred when I board her. Just in case I don't come back, I'd hate to think of you making a profit on the deal, Itch."

Mr. Sangamo looked bleak. "As you wish. I will have the money delivered to you at your hotel. There is no definite date for this voyage."

"Okay," Mitch said.

"You have no questions?"

"A million of 'em, but I'm not supposed to ask them."

"You are an intelligent man, Mitchell."

"Oh, sure. I'm an intelligent man. That's why I have to be down in Mexico, working for a Japanese agent. Bright boy, that's me all over. Well, thanks for the lunch. There is just one question: Why did you dislike my crashing an introduction with that girl?"

"Forgive me, Mitchell San," beamed Mr. Sangamo, "but you are quite mistaken. I thought you made a very charming couple."

"I thought so too," Mitch said. "And being reminded of her, I think I will invite her out to dinner with my new-found wealth. So please get that dough to me as soon as possible. *Hasta la vista*, my friend."

"Yes," said Mr. Sangamo, blinking his eyes. "It was so interesting. You are quite welcome."

CHAPTER SEVEN



AT six o'clock P.M. Miguel knocked on the door and entered. Mitchell Prescott hastily closed the small black book and held it, almost out of sight, in the palm of his hand. It was his code-book. The message he had been forming from it, he folded blandly and put into his pocket. "Look, friend," he said, "next time you wait until I say to come in. Don't burst in like that."

"I am sorry," said Miguel, his mouth twisting. "But I came to tell you Dolores will be waiting for you at six-thirty."

Mitch stared. "Waiting for me for what?"

"You are taking her out to dinner; you have an engagement with her," Miguel said. "I said you were a rich Americano and that you liked her very much. But you were shy. I said you had asked me to tell her she was very beautiful and that you would like to dine with her. She was quite flattered."

Mitch's face sagged heavily, and his eyes were hard. He got up and jammed a finger into the kid's chest. "Don't push me," he said. "You're pushing me too hard, Miguel. You're crowding me. I hate to be crowded. Tonight I'm busy. Some other time. I've got business. Not tonight. Un-tell what you told her."

Miguel was impressed. "That is impossible," he said.

"I guess you don't understand," Mitch said.

"On the contrary," said Miguel, "you do not understand! I have found you are not a rich Americano. I know you jump ship. You help me, or I tell police."

Mitch regarded the kid with an expression of mingled fury and surprise. It made quite a face. He thought about it very quickly. He wondered how he could impress upon Miguel the dangers which consorted with this brand of blackmail. But Miguel was adamant, and Miguel had him, and Miguel could throw a monkey-wrench in the whole works. Besides, the girl might be a good alibi if she could keep her mouth shut. "All right," he said slowly. "All right, six-thirty. Tell your sister we will dine at the Casa Grande, and then we will go to the Sol Cine and see Clark Gable make love. Then tell her that I will give her a lesson, and she will not go to see Clark Gable any more. How does that sound to you, Miguel?"

"Bueno," said Miguel. He looked sad. "I apologize to you. But I am desperate. Otherwise I must kill this Cortello myself."

Mitch said: "And what happens when I leave? I'm not settling down in Del Norte forever, *amigo*."

"I have thought of that. I do not know. Perhaps I will think of something. Perhaps she will not go back to him. Perhaps I kill him anyhow. You are very kind, señor. *Muchas gracias*—I am your servant, believe me."

"And you are also my informer."

Miguel shrugged. "Without the weapon, you would not help me."

"I guess that's right," Mitch said.

"I am your friend," said Miguel. "I delivered your note. Nor did I read it. I am a true friend. *Buenas noches*, señor." He went out.

A little corny, Mitch thought; but after all, what could you expect? The kid had probably been brought up on American motion-pictures and felt he was behaving in the tradition of any good hero. He was such an earnest kid. He had the makings of a killer. All killers are earnest. . . . Mitch wished fervently that Miguel lived in Timbuctoo.

But when he went down at six-thirty to pick up Dolores, he was half inclined to change his mind. She was, Willie Cheng would have said with frank enthusiasm, a dish.

She was dressed in a white silk outfit with a ballooning skirt, the white sprinkled liberally with scarlet flowers, and she had a red rose in her black hair, a little too much make-up on, but nothing harloty, and her shoes were silver with flashing bursts of rhinestone. It was High Dressing in Del Norte, and she looked gorgeous, but not for the Casa Grande—it was too much American. Mitch knew at once he couldn't take her there, which was too bad, because he had wanted to go there. He had wanted to see Polly Merritt. That was most important.

Damn Miguel a little bit, Mitch thought. But not too much. He had quite a girl on his hands, and she flashed her eyes at him, and smiled with those perfect white teeth. She was very slim and lithe; and when she walked, she flowed. It occurred to him that she could probably dance like the wind, and he was right.

"*Buenas noches*, Dolores," he said. "*Muy hermosa*. Most beautiful girl in Mexico. A fragile flower. I am a very lucky fellow."

"*Gracias*, señor," she said, cocking her head. "You like?"

"I like," Mitch said. "Where shall we go, baby?"

"You take me to Casa Grande?"

"Oh, no, no," Mitch said. "I would like to take you *con todo corazon*, but that would not be good. Too many Americanos. Too handsome. Perhaps you would see some one you liked better than me, eh? Besides, I wish to see Del Norte. I wish to go to a Mexican *fonda*."

"The Mariposa?" she said. "Ver' fine."

"The Mariposa it is!" said Mitch.

The Mariposa on Avenida Madepo was in the old city back on the hill. The burros and the goats were off the streets, but the streets still smelled of them, and the markets and *pulquerias* were still open, and you could see the sides of completely unsanitary beef hanging in the meat-shops. Around the Mariposa there were groups of men, some with multi-colored *ruanas* over their shoulders, and others in their popular black suits. They all looked like cutthroats. Mitch took her in and got a booth table close to the wall. There was an orchestra,—four violins and three guitars,—and it was very bad.

"Everybody seems to know you here," Mitch said.

"Oh, *si, si*, they know me. I come before. Sometimes I dance here. I am ver' good dancer, señor."

"You come often?"

"Often," she said.

"With your boy friend? You have a boy friend?"

"*Sí*." She dropped her eyes.

"I bet you've got a million of them," Mitch said. Might as well give Miguel a run for his money.

"Oh, no!" she said. Her voice dropped. "I am going to marry Juan Cortello. He has fine business on Calle Oceano. You know him?"

Mitch frowned. "*No es bueno*, señorita. It is not good at all. Why do you wish to marry a Falangist?"

"He is very rich," she said. "I am poor. I must. I marry Juan, he buy me many things, and I will be a lady. How you know of him?"

"I know many things."

"*Claro*," she laughed.

"Being rich doesn't make you a lady," said Mitch. "You are in love with him, this Falangist?"

"No, but he is rich."

"And you would wed without love?"

Dolores stared. "Why you ask me all this? I am not in love, so I will marry for money, no? I do not wish to be poor. It is not good to be poor."

"You mean you would not marry me if I were poor?"

"Aha!" She laughed. "I did not say that. With you, it would be different."

Dangerous ground! Better get off the tiger-trap. Mitch thought. Next thing there'd be a shotgun wedding, with daddy the bridegroom. "How come this Juan is so rich?" he asked.

"I do not know. But he has fine shop and he knows Señor Sangamo. He does work for Señor Sangamo. Japanese here very rich."

Well, well, well, Mitch thought. God bless Miguel! At last we are getting somewhere! The girl was going to be useful. So Cortello was a Sangamo side-kick, and that meant Juan knew a lot of interesting things. A camera-and-radio shop! Of course. Those were the two things any Japanese agent would be interested in. Photography and radio. Particularly radio. It was why Mitchell Prescott was in Mexico. . . .

The *fonda* was very crowded, and there were newspaper men and clerks and bullfight personnel and renegades, and thieves. The *patrón* came over and said, "*Dolores, hagame usted el favor. You dance and sing. It has been requested.*"

"No, I do not sing and dance tonight," she said.

The orchestra had struck a rattling chord, and everyone was looking over. Mitch said: "Please, señorita, accommodate the *patrón*. I would like to watch you. It would make me happy."

"*Muy bien*," she smiled. She rose and went to the floor. The orchestra started playing as if it had been prearranged, and first she sang the song, and then she borrowed castanets and danced it. Mitch was astounded. She had a soft silvery voice of exquisite beauty, and she danced like a butterfly. It was marvelous. When she finished, the café resounded with applause. Mitch joined in himself.

"Darling," he said when she came back, "you're out of this world."

"*Que es?*"

"You're terrific," he said. "I mean it. You ought to be in pictures. *Cinemagrafo*. You're made for it."

"You tease me."

"I'm on the level," Mitch said. She was very good. "Señorita, time flies. I want to talk to you about this later. But now we go to the Cine and see *el grans* Gable. Then you do me a favor?"

"*Si, señor. Anything you ask.*"

"Stop carrying the torch, baby," he said. "I'll explain later. Let's blow."

IT was getting late. He was five minutes overdue when he sat her down in the theater, in the dark, to watch the picture. He whispered: "Dolores, listen!"

"*Si?*"

"I have to go some place. Maybe an hour. Very important. Then I come back to you. Maybe we go to Casa Grande afterward. You stay here. Don't tell anyone I go. Understand?"

She said, with regret: "Why you go?"

"Business," said Mitch. "Just an hour. Be a good girl."

"*Si*," she said. "I will wait. One hour. If you no come back, I be angree."

He patted her hand. He rose quickly and stepped out through the side exit. He had not seen Sato, the yellow peril, all night long, and he was certain he had lost the guy. There was Willie Cheng in a long black car which looked very rakish; his initials were boldly emblazoned on the side of the car, with its California plates and Hollywood

marker. Mitch slammed the door and ducked low in the rear. "The Mt. Tepic road, Willie, and don't spare the horses when you get clear of the city."

"Okie dokie," said Willie. "Hold your hats, ladies."

It took twenty minutes through the darkness, and the road was bad. It curved and twisted tortuously when they started up to the summit of Tepic. At first, there had been a car behind them. Willie said: "Some one is following, Mitch."

Mitch watched it and presently it disappeared. "Gone."

"Don't count on it," Willie said. "The road has more curves than Marlene D. It may be just out of sight. We aren't crawling."

"I know, but it's pretty treacherous stuff to navigate without headlights, especially with the fog rolling in. He'd have to have his lights on, and we could see the flare of them."

"He could follow the rim of the road with his parking lights," Willie said. "I have a hunch."

"I think you're wrong."

When they reached the summit of Tepic, which overlooked the strait of the bay below, they could see the glow of Del Norte against the sky, soft and vague in the mists. The road was a dead-end, poised right on the edge of Tepic before the peak started its precipitous drop into the sea fifteen hundred feet below. Mitch's ears felt queer from the sudden ascent. The top of Tepic was graveled, with a stone wall all around the parking-space. It was a sightseeing point. The Chamber of Commerce insisted that on a clear day you could see Honolulu.

"Okay," said Mitch. "Let's get going. The sked is for eight o'clock and we've got two minutes."

He got out, took the proper key on his ring and unlocked the trunk compartment of the Cadillac. Anchored into the trunk compartment was a radio transmitter. It was a neat unit, thirty inches high and nineteen inches across which ran fifty watts input. Mitch pulled out the ready-made double antenna, consisting of thirty feet of wire in each leg, with EOI transmission cable all attached. Willie took one end of the antenna and found a tree where he anchored it, hanging it simply, while Mitch stretched it out full length and found another tree the right distance away. The antenna was up. By then the transmitter had warmed. "Get in the car and keep your eyes open," Mitch said.

"Check, cookie."

The car faced down the road they had ascended. Willie got under the wheel and watched. Mitch turned on his power and tuned the antenna. It took the load perfectly. Then, on the spot frequency which had been prearranged, Mitch began to call an amateur station in California—W6ZZB. W6ZZB actually was an unassigned call, but the FCC monitors had their instructions to disregard it. Mitch signed and waited.

They were right on the job. Back they came, calling him. He was using a W6 call too, as phony as the other. Headquarters invited him to transmit. The signals were both fine, RST 5-8-9. Mitch tapped his key, sent the coded message he had prearranged. "*Check all sampans of Geisha Tuna Company, in California, sailing to sea. Check all sampans on return. Smuggling of Shaw invention imminent, I am sure. Shaw here without doubt. Probably alive. More on this tomorrow. It will be quick. Touch and go. AR.*"

"FB," headquarters replied. "*Fine business. Excellent. Report tomorrow night same time. Maintain sked if possible.*"

"O.K.," Mitch wirelessed. "*Also give me check on Baron Ernest Falkhorst, German refugee.*"

"R," said headquarters. "*Received. Will check. SK. End of transmission.*"

Mitch sent, "SK." He turned off the transmitter and took the headphones off. And for the first time he became aware of a strange voice. The sound of the code and the headphones had not let him hear it. But now he did.

It was jet black on the peak of Mt. Tepic, and the lights of the car were off. Very carefully Mitch raised his head over the back of the car and had a look. Willie had the dashboard lighted. Willie had his hands up in the air.

Beside the car stood Nobuo Sato, the thin agent who had been on Mitchell Prescott's trail since he had first met Mr. Sangamo. Sato said: "Please to keep your hands up or you will die quick. Where is Mitchell San?" He pointed a gun at Willie's face.

"Really, tall-dark-and-horrid," said Willie quietly, "I haven't the faintest notion."

Mitch slipped his automatic out of his hip pocket. Holding it carefully with both hands (for their heads were very close together) he aimed it, held his breath, and started squeezing the trigger. It seemingly took a century for the trigger to reach a firing-point, but the pistol finally fired sharply; the bullet struck Sato squarely in the side of the head, and knocked him to the ground with startling force.

CHAPTER EIGHT



HERE was a dead silence following the sharp explosion of the pistol. Mitch's ears were ringing. He heard Willie Cheng sigh. He put his gun into his pocket and ran around the side of the car. He called: "Hand me a flashlight, Willie?"

"Cookie, you hit him cold. You don't need a flashlight," Cheng said, his teeth chattering. "I saw the thing myself. It was all delightfully horrible. Let's get out of here. He looked realer than a Twentieth Century Fox corpse in a Charley Chan picture."

Nevertheless he gave Mitch the flashlight. Mitch found that Sato was dead—a temple shot. The man never had known what had hit him. "Give me a hand with him," Mitch said, "and then let's get out of here."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Dump him down the side of Tepic into the sea," Mitch said. "If Sangamo finds the body, we're sunk. Damn it, anyhow. We've got to work fast now. He's going to realize that Sato is missing, and that won't make him put too much bosom trust in me. I thought we had lost this guy."

"I told you we were being followed."

"Yes, but you were so scared, you could have seen a caravan of agents on the trail. Take his feet."

Willie Cheng's face was not Orientaly bland and unemotional. It was painted with repugnance. He took Sato's feet and rolled his eyes skyward. "What a night," he murmured.

They carried the corpse to the retaining-wall and then spilled it over the side. It brushed down the rocky slope with a strange skidding sound, and disappeared. Mitch tossed the pistol after the body. "I hope it reaches the sea and sinks, but we can't count on that. Can't count on anything at this point. Come on, Willie. Back to town. I'll talk; you drive. Take down the antenna. I've got a gal waiting for me in the Sol Cine, and if she gets sore and walks out, it will be just too bad. She's my alibi."

They took down the forty-meter antenna and rolled it up, and replaced it in the car beside the transmitter. Mitch cut all switches on the transmitter and then locked the trunk compartment. He climbed into the car, and they went down the curving road of Mt. Tepic toward the faint luminescence in the mist, which was made by the lights of Del Norte, southward.

Mitch said: "All right. What about the *Nichyo Maru*? You got the letter, didn't you?"

"A Mexican youth movement delivered it to Cappy Porchuck at the boat. He gave it to me. I couldn't go; nobody would believe I was going fishing. So Cappy said he'd give the boat a workout. I haven't seen him since. He's got the story on the *Nichyo Maru*."

"I want to know about that," Mitch said.

"You figure that Sangamo's sampans are picking up a cargo from the *Nichyo Maru* offshore? Bootlegging it in through the customs, through the Mexican navy?"

"That wouldn't be such a difficult job. Of course Sangamo is doing that."

"And what would he be importing?" Willie asked.

"Aërial bombs," Mitch said.

"Bombs?"

"Bombs," Mitch said. "The pretty little things you drop on cities. Bombs. You can't just set up a shop and start making bombs. They're instruments which require skill, money and time. Sangamo isn't making his own bombs. He must be importing them from Japan. The military is supplying him with all he has asked for, no doubt of that."

"Look, cookie," Willie Cheng said slowly, "I'm just an unemployed movie actor who doesn't know what it's all about. What good are bombs without bombers?"

"Very good, under certain circumstances."

"I don't get it."

"That's fine. Just drive."

"But what's the gimmick, cookie? Secret bombers on secret air-fields? You mean, these warriors are really going to make a stab at bombing the States?"

"You're wonderful," Mitch said sourly. "That would be first-class suicide. No, it's all wrong. Forget it. And step on the gas."

They drove fast, as they came down the mountain, the worst of the curves over. Willie said: "I keep seeing his face when that slug hit him." He shivered.

"Don't think about it," Mitch said. "That's the way it goes. He would have been looking at yours in the same way, a few seconds later."

At the Sol Cine, Mitch left Cheng and went into the theater. He fumbled his way down the aisle and found Dolores Cervantes still in her seat, watching the machinations of a stale old Hollywood "meller" with wide eyes. She hardly glanced at him when he sat down, but she whispered, "Why you take so long?" without removing her eyes from the screen.

"Very important business," he said. "Has it been a good cinema, baby?"

"It was so thrilling. But I am ver' angry with you, señor. You leave poor little *muchacha* all alone; that was not nice. You do not leave nice girl alone like this. Juan would be mos' angry if he hear you leave me such a way."

"Juan would be most angry if he knew you were out with another guy, anyway, wouldn't he?"

"*Si, si*," she whispered, laughing to herself. "He be angry like old *toro*." She persisted: "You tell me where you go?"

"Sorry, baby."

Ultimately, Mitch thought, the picture would finish, and it did. He took her hastily from the theater and hailed a *coche*. "Now," he said, "we are going to Casa Grande, and I am going to have you meet a big Hollywood producer."

"*Mientes*," she said, pouting. "You tell me all lies."

"No, it's the truth," he said. "Baby, you've got what it takes, so why not? He's been looking for talent, and he doesn't believe there's an ounce of talent in the whole of Mexico. I'm going to show him."

They were riding in the *coche* then. She looked at him for a long time and finally she said: "Señor, why do you do this for Dolores? You are not in love with me?"

"Who knows?" Mitch said.

"I know," she said. "I know when a man in love with me. He get fresh and try to kiss me."

"You want me to get fresh?"

Dolores laughed. "You are ver' fonny, Mitch. No, you not get fresh because you not in love with this *muchacha*. Maybe some one else, eh? Then why you do this for me?"

"Maybe," Mitch said, "you do something for me."

She stared at him. "What I do for you? I can do nothing for you. I am nobody."

"You can tell me things about Juan Cortello," Mitch said.

"So—" she whispered. Her eyes widened. "I think better you take me home."

Mitch watched her steadily. "You would not like to do me a favor, señorita?"

"No, no," she said. "I tell you nothing."

"You love Señor Cortello so much?"

"No, I do not love him," she said. "But I tell nothing. I am afraid, señor, I say nothing. You know what they do with *lenguas largas*? Sctt!" She passed her finger across her throat. "*Hagame usted el favor*, you take me home, señor. You keep the Hollywood. I am afraid. I am only silly *muchacha*, I know nothing."

"I'll be damned," Mitch said quietly. "Casa Cervantes, driver." He leaned back wearily.

Nothing was said for a few moments. He felt her staring at the side of his head. He did not look at her. She whispered; "Señor Prescott hate me?"

"No," he said abruptly. "Forget it. I'll still take you to see that producer. I think he can use you. But not tonight. I've got to work tonight. You see, there's a guy down here who shouldn't be down here. He was stolen, kidnapped. He too is afraid. Soon maybe these bandits kill him. You can understand that, at least."

"Say nothing," she whispered. "*Nada*. It is a trap—it is all a trap for you. I do not want to marry Cortello; they make me. I do not want to spy on you."

"Spy on me?" Mitch said. "You mean Cortello—"

She put her hand over his mouth. "*Por Dios*," she whispered, her eyes agonized, "do not speak so loudly, señor. The driver, he may hear you. He may be one of them. It is Fácista, and with *lenguas largas*, they have no mercy." She was panting.

He took her hand away. "They did it to your daddy, didn't they? Miguel told me. In Guadalajara, in the back. Now you are afraid. This man I speak of, he too has a daughter. She is here. She is waiting, trying to find him. She too is afraid."

"No, no," she whispered. "Say no more. Señor, you listen. You leave here. You go away. Believe me. I am only *muchacha*, I know nothing of *políticos*, but this I know—you go away—not come back. They kill you, they kill me, if they know I tell you. You leave—"

The *coche* had reached Casa Cervantes. Mitch paid the driver, and the taxi vanished. They stood there a moment on the street. She said: "You do as I say?"

"No," Mitch said.

"*Por Dios!*" she breathed. She looked as if she would cry. "You must go. You ver' nice, you ver' sweet to Dolores. Now I am ashamed! Please you go away; you cannot find this Señor Shaw, it is no use, and they kill you. They know who you are, Mitchell; already they know. They play with you like cat and mouse, you believe Dolores. If they find I tell you this, I am dead *muchacha*." "By God!" Mitchell Prescott rasped in stupefaction. "How in God's name did you know his name? Have you seen him? Where is he?"

"I can say no more," she said, her face pale as death. "*Buenas noches*, señor—you go home to *los Estados Unidos* quick now *pronto*." She turned and ran into the hotel, and disappeared back in the lobby.

He restrained himself from a pursuit. There was a powerful urge to seize her and make her talk, for obviously she knew enough to make a real difference. That meant Cortello, all right. He turned to leave, for the Casa Grande, when Miguel appeared in the doorway.

"Señor."

"What is it, Miguel?"

"Dolores seemed much upset," Miguel said.

"Listen, Miguel," said Mitch, "I've got other things on my mind than your sister. We had a very nice time, and I tried to kiss her, and that was rushing things too much because she got sore and ran inside."

"You are retiring, señor?"

"No. Do you mind? You ask so many questions, Miguel. You are a very interesting fellow."

"Forgive me, señor. It is only I do not wish you to run away and leave my sister with this Cortello. Otherwise I will have to kill him. I feel very strongly on it, señor, for I have sworn enmity to the Fácista as long as I breathe!"

"Good," Mitch said. "Good night, Miguel."

"Good night, señor," Miguel said. "I will straighten out the trouble with Dolores. Tomorrow she will be all happy about you again."

"Doubtless," Mitch said dryly.

CHAPTER NINE



HERE was a drugstore open on the corner of Calle Oceano and Avenida Guaymas, and it had a public telephone. Mitchell Prescott went in. It was a few minutes past midnight. He got the telephone directory and looked up Cortello, Juan. There were two numbers for the guy: one his place of business, the other his residence. Mitch telephoned Cortello's residence. He had to do an imitation, and he could not make up his mind between Alvarez, or Sangamo. He would rather it had been Koji or Sato, but he had not heard them speak enough. In the end he selected Sangamo, because he felt Cortello might recognize an imperfection in the impersonation of a Spaniard, whereas the Japanese might be more difficult to disbelieve in.

A man answered silkily: "*Es Señor Cortello*."

"*Hayaku, hayaku!*" Mitch said, sucking in his breath. "*Es Sangamo*. Shaw has killed himself. Come quick." He hung up instantly.

The fat was in the fire anyhow, he thought grimly, as he struck down Calle Oceano. He had scribbled down the name and address of Cortello's establishment, the camera and radio shop. He wondered if it were true, if Sangamo did know who he was. He doubted it himself. What she had meant was, they were trying hard to know who he was. But they were not sure. They could not be sure. He was still alive. That was the most obvious testimony. It was quite possible that Sangamo might prolong his man-trap until he had probed into Mitch enough to learn if there were confederates.

No use conjecturing. Sato was dead, and that put the fat in the fire, but definitely. The telephone-call also would have its ill effects, but at that point, it was worth making. He found the store on the ocean boulevard, and he took up a position in a shadowed alley some distance away, where he could watch it. There was a small parking-space behind the store, but it was reached only by driving in through the narrow driveway on the southern side. Not more than ten minutes passed before a car raced up Calle Oceano from the south and screeched to a stop in front. A man got out. Mitch was close enough to hear a ring of keys jingling. He poked out his head farther, saw the man disappear into the store. No lights came on. The door closed.

That proved to Mitch's complete satisfaction, at that moment, that he had done two things. He had assured himself that Howard Shaw was still alive (or why would Cortello have come so excitedly at the news of death?) and that Shaw was somewhere in, around, above or below the store.

How nice it would have been, in the old country, to have known this, to have had a squad of special agents secreted near by, with submachine-guns, rifles and gas! Blow a whistle and take the joint.

He could not, unfortunately, do that little trick by himself. He had a lion by the tail and couldn't let go. He knew where Shaw was, and he couldn't do a great deal about it. . . . But still, he felt better. It gave him a lift.

Del Norte was a big place to hide a man in. Shaw could have been in one of several places, and it could have taken much time even to locate him. So this at least was a break.

And where Shaw was, there was a new kind of death being manufactured for the folks back home. Mr. Sangamo had not spirited Mr. Shaw to Baja California for the fine air.

Mitch didn't wait any longer. He returned furtively up Calle Oceano to the grounds of the Casa Grande, and cut across them to the main entrance of the hotel. He entered the magnificent marbled lobby. It was deathly still, but he heard the sound of faint laughter in the Cafe Americano and when he went in, he found it convivially populated with ladies and gentlemen. He stopped at the bar himself. "Aguardiente," he said.

"Prescott!" a voice called. "Come join us."

Mitch turned, saw Dave Adams, Baron Falkhorst and Al Roche sitting together at a table. He took his brandy and sat down with them. They were having nightcaps.

"Don't you drink anything but *aguardiente*?" asked Al Roche. "That aint a drink for a man at this time of night."

"It flows in my veins," Mitch said. "And seeing you, reminds me of the little Mexican girl over at my hotel. You are talking about talent. I heard her sing and dance in a *fonda*, and of course I don't know anything about it, Al, but a guy like you ought to have himself a look. Dolores Cervantes is her name."

"Can she act?"

"Does it matter, in Hollywood?"

Al Roche grinned. "What does she do, besides giving you the eye?"

"No," Mitch said. "You've got her wrong. She's a good kid, Al. She has the voice of an angel. And twinkle-toes when she dances. You ought to scout her, or else drop in at the Mariposa and get a long shot of her in action. For almost free, you'd have a sensation, with a little smart Good Neighbor advertising."

"Listen to this guy," Al Roche grinned. "I ought to be jaying you. You got more brains than an agent, and they are about the smartest guys I know. I'll take a look at her."

"You could pull quite a nice personal gag—Al Roche combs South America for new star—and Al Roche finds her, in Mexico."

"You use your head, Joe—"

"Mitch."

"Mitch. I'll look at her while I'm here. Well, gents, I got to say good-night. In Hollywood we take in the side-walks at midnight. I'm not used to this night life." He waved and went out, the cigar still in his mouth. Mitch hoped it was a different one.

David Adams said: "We were talking about flying, Prescott. Do you fly?"

"Oh, a little. Nothing much. Hundred hours."

"I've got exactly thirty on a cub," Adams grinned. "But the Baron insists that it is only gliding with a motor, not flying."

"Quite true," Baron Falkhorst said with an unpleasant smile. "Landing one of those flying kites is nothing like landing what we call a hot ship. Indeed, I doubt seriously if you could land my Spartan at all. Her stalling speed is ninety-five miles an hour, and if you try to stall her in, she will fall right out from under you. She lands very hot, and it takes dexterity. You can imagine the dexterity it takes for these pursuit ships over England."

"I didn't know you flew," Mitch said.

"I like to fly very much."

"He has some ship," said Adams. "Haven't you seen that silver Spartan over Del Norte? The low-wing monoplane with the P. & W. Wasp Jr.?"

"No," Mitch said. "I didn't know there was an airport around here. These hills—"

"There's an airport at Rosarito, ten miles south," Adams said.

"And you fly out of there, Baron?"

"Ja," Baron Falkhorst said reluctantly. He put down an unfinished drink as if he felt he had talked too much. "If you gentlemen will forgive me, I think I will retire. It is quite late. Good night, Mr. Adams. *Au revoir*, Mr. Prescott."

He nodded and went out.

Mitch said to Adams: "If I were to ask you to get your clearance papers and sail out of this pesthole as soon as possible, what would you say?"

Adams smiled at him disarmingly. "Oh, I shouldn't be much surprised. You're the sort of fellow who I'm afraid not."

"I meant," Mitch said, "that you were to take her with you."

Adams looked at him without saying anything.

Mitch nodded. "It's very important."

Adams said: "I've had a nasty feeling that there was a maggot in the apple around here."

"As soon as possible. Her life may depend upon it."

"Okay," Adams said quietly. "Does she know this?"

"I'll tell her. See the Port Authority first thing in the morning and get your clearance. Then sail."

"Okay," Adams said. "Thanks, old man"

"Sure," Mitch said. "Good night."

He paid for his brandy and went out.

HE asked the desk clerk for Polly Merritt's room number. Then he took the elevator up to the sixth floor and got out. He found the door and knocked on it. No answer. He knocked again.

"Who is it?" she asked tremulously.

"Prescott," he said.

"Who?"

"Mitchell Prescott, dear. Open up."

"I'm not dressed," she whispered. "I can't let you in."

"Very interesting." He sighed heavily. "I suppose I could shout it through the transom. . . . Look, baby, I'm married and have four children, two of them legitimate. Open the door and don't act like a child."

She opened the door, and he pushed it wider, for she was hesitant. He stepped in, but did not advance into the room. She was so situated that the other L of the hotel wing was across the open court; anyone on the other side could look in. He said: "Turn out that light."

She turned out the light by her bed. He had a momentary glimpse of her before the darkness swallowed her. She looked very small and very pretty in her ice-blue negligée, her hair falling to her shoulders, her face filled with a young lost look. Then it was dark.

He could hear her breathing rapidly. He said: "Take it easy, baby. I need the dark. I'm like the little mole who spoils all the lovely lawns. I like the dark. Relax, please. God, I'm tired."

"Why did you come here at this time of night? What do you want?" she asked. But her voice was no longer afraid, nor hostile.

"Right now," he said, "I want sleep. But I'm not going to get it. It seems as if I haven't slept in a million years. Where's a chair?"

"Behind you."

He sat down; he could see her slim outline in the dark, opposite him. He sighed.

Polly said: "You looked terrible, Mitchell."

"Thank you, dear. We've always time for compliments." She moved across to him, and knelt beside him on the floor. He felt her hand on his face. She stroked his forehead. Her hand was cold.

"That feels damned good," he said. "Did you put the children to bed?"

"Yes," she said. Her voice sounded as if it would laugh.

"The cat is out, of course? And you've wound the clock?"

"Why did you come?"

"I've located your father," he said. "Now don't ask me a lot of foolish questions. Just sit still and listen."

She was shivering. He could feel it. He took her hands, face to face with her. He said: "Your father is safe. He's alive. That much I know. I'm not going to tell you where he is, because it wouldn't make any difference to you. I don't know how to get him yet. But I really came here to tell you that you are leaving Del Norte."

"I couldn't possibly," she said sharply. "I couldn't possibly leave before I find my father."

"Baby, look! How long have you been here? How much finding have you done since you came free-lancing down on your own?" He was silent a moment. "Incidentally, how the hell did you ever know that your father was being held in this burg? There are lots of countries in the world, and thousands of cities, and millions of villages, and you picked Del Norte. Some coincidence."

"No coincidence," she said softly.

"You're telling me?" Mitch replied dryly. "Who tipped you off, baby? Who was the good Samaritan? You've got a friend here, that's the only answer. Adams? Is he just here for a vacation, or is he someone else?"

"Dave Adams?" she said. "He didn't tell me anything. He isn't anything he hasn't said he is. He's a lawyer in Los Angeles. Even Mr. Roche knew him."

"Then how come you're here in the first place?"

"I do have a friend here," she said. "When Dad disappeared, I was frantic. I didn't know where he had gone, and I didn't have any money. Dad had plenty, of course, but I couldn't use it without his signature. I didn't know what to do. Then one night this friend telephoned me, said he knew where my father had been taken. Del Norte. This friend financed my trip, got my room here for me, took care of everything. He was perfectly swell about it, said we could reimburse him later."

"Who was he?"

"Mr. Ichiro Sangamo," she whispered.

"Good God!" Mitch said hollowly.

"What's the matter?"

"Good God!" he repeated. The hackles were up on his neck, and a cold shudder shook him as if he were trying to cast off an invisible leech. His voice was filled with a horror he did not know he could be capable of.

OH, the Nipper was a smart little man! Ten times from Sunday smarter than he, Mitch thought bitterly. Far ahead, and no catching up.

"Mitch—"

"Nothing—it's okay," he said. "Just remembered something important I forgot to remember. No harm done." There was no good reason to try and explain to her about Ichiro Sangamo. It was problematical if she would have believed anything unkind about the "benevolent" little Japanese at that point, and Mitch did not want to isolate her from himself. But he felt broken, defeated.

Her cool hands touched his head again. "Are you all right, Mitchell?"

"Yes."

"You sound a million miles away."

"I'm still with you. More or less."

"Do you think you'll get my dad safely, Mitch?"

"I think so. But only if you leave."

"Why do you want me to leave?"

"Because while you're here, they can always seize you as a hostage, and prevent me from getting your father away. Don't you see that?"

"Yes, but no one knows—"

"Please, baby! Everybody knows everything in this place. For God's sake, don't argue with me—not tonight. I'm a gone duck."

"All right," she said gently. "I'll go."

"That's a good girl. . . . Adams is sailing in his fisherman in the morning. He's getting clearance papers from the Aduana, and he is telling them that you are sailing

with him. Sorry we haven't time for a chaperon, Polly, but I guess he's a scholar and a gentleman."

"He is."

"He's also a lucky guy," Mitch said faintly. "I wish I were going to be in his shoes. From Del Norte to Los Angeles at sea in a boat with you! But maybe it's just as well."

"Why?" she asked.

"I'm not a scholar and a gentleman."

"You're very tired," she said. "Why don't you get some sleep?"

"I," he said, "cannot sleep."

"Can't you get some rest and continue tomorrow?"

"No, baby. There's no tomorrow in this racket. I really don't think they would wait for me." He leaned back and closed his eyes. "I've got to go. Got to get out of here. But you have a fine perfumy smell, and your hands are soft and your voice is gentle and low. Funny, isn't it?"

Polly whispered: "What's funny, Mitch?" She was very quiet, looking at him, her face hidden by the dark.

"I feel as if I'd known you a hell of a long time."

"I too," she said. She touched his hand. "For such a long time, Mitch."

"It's different with me," he said. "You see, I had a file on you. I've been living with you for more than just yesterday and today. There was your picture and everything about you. I got to know you before I ever met you. I said to myself: 'Mitch, old rake, there is a dame you are going to pitch a little woo with—when, as and if.' Yes, señorita, I promised myself that I would kiss you when I got the chance."

There was a silence. She did not move. Mitch still reposed there without opening his eyes. She said finally: "And you've never had the chance?"

He opened his eyes and smiled at her in the dark. He saw her head framed against the lighter darkness of the window. He pulled her toward him and kissed her hard on the lips, expecting her to withdraw, rebelling. She did not withdraw, rebelling, but seemed to relax closer to him; and when he stopped kissing her, she kissed him back. Mitch broke away and stood up.

Polly whispered: "Mitch—"

"No dice, Polly. No dice."

"Why did you kiss me, then?"

"I don't know," he said. "Because you're a woman. A lovely woman. Because I've thought about you a lot. Because maybe I'm in—what the hell, anyone would want to kiss you. You're a swell girl."

"You didn't mean it," she said.

"Of course I meant it. Anyone would mean it. That Adams is a very lucky guy. A very fortunate fellow. I guess you know he's in love with you. If he makes a wife out of you, he's the luckiest guy in the world. And I think he's just the man for the job."

She was silent. Mitch shifted uncomfortably. "But take me!" he said glumly. "You take a guy like me: I can't imagine anything nicer than kissing you on my own time, of falling in love with you and having you fall in love with me, and a cottage small by a waterfall and everything that goes with it. But it's no dice."

"Why not?"

"No time," he said. "The world's gone to pot. When the world goes to pot, a guy like me doesn't have time for anything except the fight. When one guy kicks another guy around, I've got to be there. When one guy tweaks another guy's nose, I've got to be there. When the strong start stepping on the meek, that's the time for Mitch to go to work. A man does what he can; it's something he feels inside. And it doesn't leave any time for anything, baby. No time for love, no time for a beautiful girl. . . . No, by God, no time for glory either, nor medals nor fine talk and empty phrases." His voice dropped, low and hard. "Not even time for mercy. So it's hail and farewell."

"Hail and farewell," she whispered. "And God bless you, Mitch!"

He kissed her again, very gently this time. "I believe you understand," he said. "Good-by, Miss Chips. Tomorrow at dawn, you blow out of this *tortilla* town with Adams in his boat. Believe me—I'll send your dad home to you."

He squeezed her hand, then opened the door and stepped out into the hall. It was deserted. He descended to the street and hurried back to Casa Cervantes.

CHAPTER TEN



HE streets of Del Norte were deserted. Mitch went back to Casa Cervantes; it was deserted too. He opened the front door, went in. Back in the lobby, Miguel was sitting at the switchboard. Mitch didn't want to talk to him. But Miguel suddenly said: "Hsst!"

"*Que es?*" Mitch asked wearily.

"They are here," Miguel whispered. "In your room. Two of them. Koji and another—a little Japanese with glasses and much teeth."

"How did they get in my room?"

"They said they were friends and you had told them to wait there. Señor, I was afraid to argue."

Mitch frowned. He felt hunches telegraphing themselves to his mind, but everything was confused. If it was a powwow, okay. But if they had come for him, he'd have to go in with his gun out. That wouldn't look very good. He glanced at Miguel. The kid might make a good reserve. He took his revolver from his hip pocket, passed it to Miguel. "You can shoot?"

"Sí, señor."

"If I don't telephone down in five minutes, you come up, and use the gun. If I do come down with the gentlemen, stop us, for they will be taking me away. I have done you a favor with your sister. You will do this for me?"

"Señor, it is a pleasure."

Mitch walked upstairs. He didn't like the set-up, but he had to take the chance. Sangamo might just be there for a powwow. If not, they would never give him a chance to use the gun anyhow. He had to talk. You could talk your way out of ninety-nine per cent of the predicaments you could get yourself into. He opened his door and went in.

"Good evening, Mitchell," Mr. Sangamo said. He was sitting in the easy-chair by the window. "You will kindly raise your hands."

It was no powwow, then.

"Why?"

"Because Koji is behind the door with a pistol, and he will fire if you make one move toward your pocket."

Mitchell raised his hands. "I've lost my gun," he said. The plump Koji fanned him expertly for any arms. There were none.

"We have the one in the bag," Mr. Sangamo said. "Another beside that, perhaps?"

"Oh, no," Mitch said. "No further artillery. They hadn't sent me my Bofors yet. What goes on here, little man?"

"It was so clever of you to disconnect ground lead of microphone planted in your room here," Mr. Sangamo said.

"I wanted to be alone," Mitch said.

"It was not so clever of you not to disconnect ground lead of microphone planted in the room of Miss Merritt, Mitchell. Really, I am surprised at you; I should have thought it would be obvious."

Mitch stared. He had no feeling in his body, no sense of anger at himself, no sense of defeat, no frantic desire to forestall the end. For this was the end—no doubt of that.

"I brought the young woman down here, you know," Mr. Sangamo said. "It was so very interesting to do that."

"Yes," Mitch said. "So very, very interesting. Howard Shaw wouldn't do the dirty job for you, would he? He wouldn't build the rig for you, wouldn't show you a schematic. He said you could kill him before he would show you a thing. So you brought down Polly to help find her father. The Good Samaritan! And then you showed Shaw his daughter in Del Norte, and promised him delightfully macabre things would happen to her if he did not repent and get to work. So he had to get to work."

"But of course, it was so very simple," Mr. Sangamo said. "Please do not be resentful, Mitchell. You played your brief game excellently. Indeed, I almost *believed* your background at first, and I am so very agnostic. Your entire little drama was well staged; the false clippings were excellently executed, even to the aging of the paper. And you know, your department, cleverly, has persisted in inserting small stories in the paper, continuing to describe the pursuit for you. I have enjoyed it very much."

"Next week, East Lynne," Mitch said. "So what?"

"One or two questions: What is your official position? I do not believe you are a Naval Intelligence officer."

"I'm an amateur, for the sport."

"Yes," Mr. Sangamo smiled. "Possibly a special agent from the Department of Justice?"

"It is such very fine sport."

"Yes, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, I think. It was they who tried to regain the gas-mask filters we were so very fortunate in obtaining samples of, sometime ago. You need not tell me; it makes little difference. I was only curious as to which department would be interested in my humble efforts."

"Some humble," said Mitch. "You've been some solid on this fracas, Itch."

Mr. Sangamo beamed. He rubbed his chin with his cane. "And now, Mitchell, I have the most delightful surprise for you."

"I can imagine. *Hara-kiri*, or does Koji do the job?"

"But no. You are so very cross, so very unfeeling, so very, very indelicate."

"I didn't know that killing was refined, Itch."

"Killing? But let us not talk of killing, Mitchell. I have a very rare treat for you. I am going to take you to see Howard Shaw."

Mitch shivered. "If it's the pussy-cat playing with the mouse, Itch, let's skip it."

"I would like you to see him. You have tried so very hard, and it has been so very, very interesting. Then you are going to stay with Shaw San. Unfortunately, I must withdraw my offer of allowing you to pilot my sampan to sea." He grinned. "It is just what you would have wished, eh, Mitchell? I thought so at the first. It is why I offered you the job, to see what you would do. How overjoyed you must have been! The foolish Sangamo had walked right into your trap. Indeed, he was going to let you pilot the sampan on which *everything* depended. That poor foolish Sangamo!"

"No," Mitch said. "I thought there was something phony in that. . . . So I join Mr. Shaw."

"And Mr. Cheng," said Mr. Sangamo. "We have already taken the eminent young Chinese cinema-player into custody. As I say, I am extremely magnanimous. I will allow Mr. Adams and Miss Shaw—our mutual and delightful friend Polly—to sail tomorrow. She knows nothing, and he knows less. As for yourself and Cheng and Shaw—" He shrugged. "But we shall not talk about such things."

"It was to be expected," Mitch said. "We expect these things, you and I, do we not?"

"True, so very true," Mr. Sangamo said. "You are a gentleman, Mitchell; and believe me, it has been so very nice knowing you. Please, now, we shall go."

"Okay," Mitch said.

"You seem extremely confident," Mr. Sangamo said. "I trust you will do nothing impetuous, Mitchell. Mr. Koji will not hesitate, I assure you."

"I'm aware of that."

"Excellent. It is just a brave heart, perhaps? Let us go."

They went downstairs. Miguel was sitting behind the switchboard. Mitch looked at him hard and nodded. Miguel stood up. They all paused. Miguel had the revolver in his hand, quite openly, but he did not aim it. "Señor Sangamo," he said, "here is his revolver."

"Thank you," Sangamo said, and took it. "You know his mind well."

Mitch said: "Miguel, you fool—this is the Falange—the *Fáscista*!"

"Of which," Miguel replied quietly, "I am a member, Señor Prescott."

Mr. Sangamo said: "Miguel, it has been well done. There is compensation for this fine work. I shall not forget it."

"*Es nada*," Miguel said, smiling coldly. "He was so simple."

"Yes," Mitch said, his heart burning. "Simple. It would be better to say goodbye, Miguel. Not *hasta la vista*."

Miguel smiled coldly. "You did not think, señor. Would Alvarez have sent you to the hotel of an enemy?"

"I considered that," Mitch replied. "But I couldn't believe that any man would be low enough to use his sister as bait. Were you afraid to take the chances yourself?"

"Do not be bitter, señor," Miguel said. "It makes you insulting."

"Please," Mr. Sangamo interrupted, "we must be going, for it is growing late, and I have many things to do."

"I hope," Mitch said, "that I may have the misfortune of meeting you again, Miguel."

"I think that can be managed, señor," said Miguel evenly. He glanced at Mr. Sangamo.

"Yes," Mr. Sangamo said. "Come along."

"You will see me again, then," Miguel said. "And I assure you, señor, as you have said, it will be unfortunate. For you."

CHAPTER ELEVEN



R. SANGAMO'S car was an elderly but immaculately polished limousine, *circa* 1935. He himself drove, leaving Mitch in the back seat with Tsu Koji, whose eyes were bright and sharp, and whose whole being was set like a hair-trigger, waiting to be sprung in the event that Mitch attempted anything. Koji held a nine-millimeter Luger; it was an ugly-looking pistol.

As they drove, Mr. Sangamo said, "Would it be indiscreet of me to inquire after Sato San, Mitchell? He is—as the *communiqués* say—long overdue. Must he be presumed lost?"

Mitch said: "I wouldn't wait up for him."

"Ah—" Mr. Sangamo breathed. Then he was silent. "That displeases me very much."

"It probably displeased him a lot more."

They reached Calle Oceano and turned south. Presently the car stopped. Mitch glanced out. They had halted before a store—the one into which he had seen Juan Cortello disappear earlier that night. It was a big shop, modern design, with glass-brick walls around the entrance, and a show-window filled with the finest German cameras, and the best American radio-receivers. There were smaller signs, RADIO REPAIR and ALL FILMS DEVELOPED, in English and obviously intended for the tourists.

Koji nudged Mitch with the pistol, and Mitch got out. Mr. Sangamo was already out of the car. They approached the door and then went in.

Mr. Sangamo locked the door behind him. They passed through the *tienda*—it was a polished and spectacular sort of store—and into the back room where the storage bins were located, along with the dark-room and camera-repair department. Another key unlocked the cellar door, and

they went downstairs. The cellar was extremely large, excavated fully under the store above; it had a floor of inoleum and insulated walls. There were no windows. The cellar door itself had bars on the inside, though it looked harmless enough before you opened it to come down. The place was lighted with daylight-type fluorescent tubes. There was a workbench with tools, for metal-work, a lathe, a drill-press, a workbench for woodwork, a table for radio work, its shelves stocked with various resistor and condenser storage cabinets; a supply of all types of receiving and transmitting radio tubes lay in a deep-bellied drawer open under the table.

Mitch drank in the sight of the place with a blank face. But it was an amazing undertaking. There was a single crate on the floor, very long and not very wide. The top was open. In it was the fuselage of a model airplane.

There were two bright yellow wings to the model airplane. The wings were detached from the ship, and there was provision in the crate for their safe stowing. They had a spread of fifteen feet.

At the radio bench, using a small soldering-iron, sat a tired round-shouldered man with gray hair, his spectacles having slid far down his nose. His face was thin and striated; he needed a shave, and his hair was unkempt. A cigarette with a long ash hung drearily from his lips.

"Shaw San," said Mr. Sangamo.

The gray-haired man turned slowly and glanced over. He took in Mitchell Prescott without an expression of any kind on his face. He was licked. "Yes?"

"Permit me to introduce a fellow-countryman of yours," said Mr. Sangamo. "Mitchell Prescott. He was so rash as to visit Del Norte to rescue you from my evil clutches. It was so very interesting."

"Hello, Mitch," Shaw said. "Have these devils got you?"

"They have," Mitch said. "They've got me. I wouldn't mind that so much. There are plenty like me to draw from. But I wish I could have got you out. There's only one Howard Shaw. Your country needs you. I'm sorry I flopped on that part of it. My luck's been sour all the way. How are you, Shaw?"

"Alive," Shaw said. "That's all. Alive. And I wish to God I were dead. My daughter—"

"Your daughter is okay," Mitch said.

"Yes," said Mr. Sangamo. "Quite so. She is. It might be reassuring to you both to know that although I am a *politico*, and could stop Adams San from receiving his clearance papers, I am going to allow the girl to escape with him right under my nose. Is that not magnificent of me? I will allow her to return safely to the United States."

"You told me that before," said Mitch. "In other words, you have no further use for Mr. Shaw."

"Mr. Shaw was most stubborn and reluctant to draw up a schematic of this radio-controlled aerial bomb, this flying bomb, which you see about the place. Finally he assented. I have the schematic right here in my pocket. Of course, we could have checked the circuit, removing part by part, but we might have made errors, and I wanted no guesswork in the windings of the coils. So, having the schematic, I no longer need Mr. Shaw, true."

Mitch swept the shop with his eyes. "Any objection to my looking around?"

"Not at all," Mr. Sangamo. "But from where you stand. Perhaps you would like an explanation. Mr. Shaw, you may show our impetuous friend your precious secret, which you have so kindly donated to us here."

Mitch moved over by the radio workbench. Shaw drooped again, as though there was a weight on his back. You could see he had been through this explanation before. "This is the receiver," he said. It was a cylindrical aluminum can about three inches in diameter. "RK62 tube, and that's all. Just a one-tube receiver which operates a highly sensitive Sigma relay at distances up to ten miles. This goes into the fuselage of the model, just back of the two-cylinder engine."

Mitch said: "The antenna rod couples to the receiver?" "That's right. The rest of it is pretty complicated, but briefly the idea is this: We put a transmitter, about one hundred watts, in an airplane, a real airplane. That transmitter is the one which controls this model airplane. There is an arrangement operating from the Sigma relay which activates small permanent magnet motors. You don't send a steady carrier to the receiver. You just give the radio frequency energy out in small shots—*dit-dit-dits*. Look here, you use an ordinary telephone dial for the pulsations. Nine pulsations. If you just pulse it once, that is, send one dot, the relay throws a cam in the ship to a point which places controls at neutral. Position two—two *dits*, that is—left rudder. Position three, right rudder. And so forth."

"I see," Mitch said. "In other words, you send out a series of dots, one to nine as the case may be, on a specified frequency. The receiver is tuned to that frequency. The receiver operates the relay each time it receives a dot. And the relay makes the plane do certain things, according to the number of dots received."

"That's right," said Shaw. "I got the idea for a kid who wanted to control his model plane in the air at one of those model air meets. So I did it, just a simple one with four controls—up and down, right and left. It worked so well, I figured maybe the U. S. Army would like it on a practical basis, so I worked out full control of a ship by radio."

"And the U. S. Army liked it," said Mr. Sangamo with a jolly smile. "But Mitchell knows that, or he would not be here."

"The Japs also liked it," Shaw said, his voice dull. "Some damned fool in the War Department gave out the story to the newspapers this fall. Maybe you read about the guy who had invented the flying bomb—me. And the fact that the Army was going to develop it. That was all these rats needed. The next thing I knew, I was in Mexico with a gun at my back and a soldering-iron in my hand."

Mr. Sangamo took Mitch by the arm. He led him over to the crate on the floor. Very gently he unlocked a screw and lifted the roof of the fuselage off. Nestled in the fuselage of the ship, on rigid supports, was a gray metal aerial bomb with its ominous tail fins. It was not very large. "Forty pounds," Mr. Sangamo said. "The engine and size of the ship will not support anything heavier. But these do very nicely."

"Yes," Mitch said. "That's what happened to your sampan when it blew up?"

"How clever of you!" Mr. Sangamo said. "But yes, we did need to experiment with it. You see, at first Shaw San was too intelligent, and he constructed a model which did not operate at all. It was then I was compelled to invite his daughter down. After that, the second model proved quite excellent in its flying trials. So we loaded a bomb in her and destroyed my oldest sampan, just to see what the instrument could do. As you are aware, it was deadly accurate."

"Yes."

Mr. Sangamo said, pointing at the model with his cane: "We can also—as we are doing—substitute a lighter bomb and add some incendiaries. Do you know what we will do with these?"

"Yes. You'll unload them in the dark over the West Coast aircraft factories, by remote control, and there won't be anyone to catch."

"That is quite right. But you must realize, too, that what works in a model can be made to work in full size. Think of it, Mitchell, a flying two-thousand-pound bomb, directed by remote control. I think perhaps that might even bother a battleship, one day coming."

Shaw grunted and threw his cigarette away.

Mitch patted Shaw on the back. "Never mind, friend. It wasn't your fault."

"It would have been better if I'd never thought of it," said Shaw. "What the hell, here's the end of it!"

"That is so," said Mr. Ichiro Sangamo with a sigh. "It is the end. My watch tells me it is quarter of four. So we will be going. I trust you were impressed, Mitchell?"

"Very much impressed," Mitch said. "You did a nice quick job, building these things in six weeks. But there is one thing you haven't told me, Itch. You haven't explained how it would take an expert flyer to handle the radio control. No layman could appreciate the action of the model. It would take a good flyer to know how to make the model do what it was supposed to do."

"I have finished my explanations," Mr. Sangamo said coldly. "We had time to waste, and it seemed courteous to show you what you had been searching for. Come, let us be going."

"Baron Falkhorst is a good flyer," Mitch said.

Koji dug his gun into Mitchell Prescott's back.

"I do not wish to speak of it any more," Mr. Sangamo said with a grave air. "It is over. It is finished. You have lost. I am so very, very sorry. Believe me, Mitchell, if it could be some other way, I would choose that way."

"Oh, for God's sake!" Mitch said wearily.

Mr. Sangamo shrugged. He motioned toward a steel door. "You and Shaw San will kindly wait in there. It is so extremely comforting to have you under lock and key at this time, Mitchell. I have been dreading that you would be free when the *Chochó* sailed. It was important that you not be free to deter her. So this is the end. *Sayonara*, gentlemen, *sayonara*! You will wait in that room. I shall not see you again." He bowed somberly.

Koji unlocked the steel door, pushed it open. Mitch walked in without a glance at Sangamo. Howard Shaw followed, lighting another cigarette. He seemed a little relieved. "I feel like a kid let out of school. No more of that damned soldering-iron and constructing rigs. God, that was monotonous work! A man might as well be dead as doing the same thing over and over." They were in. Koji slammed the door, locked it.

"Hi, cookie," Willie Cheng said. He had a black eye. His clothes were soiled. He was sitting in a broken chair, smoking. He looked a little pale.

"Hello, Willie," Mitch said. "You know Shaw?"

"Yeah. They introduced us when the strong-arm men dragged me in here."

"Who brought you in?"

"Cortello and Alvarez. I am very happy to report that Cortello is definitely *non corpus mentis*. I delivered him a very foul blow. With the knee."

"That's some eye you have there."

"Yes," Willie said. "Alvarez clipped me with a gun-butt. In the happy hunting-ground, I am going to stand guard at the portal and wait for Rafael Alvarez to come by. Then I am going to tie him up and pour gasoline around him and flip cigarette-butts at him. Oh, happy day!"

"Porchuck?" Mitch said.

"They didn't get him," Willie said. "He's still loose. There's a chance. He might have seen them take me. I was right at the Municipal Pier."

"That's a long shot," Mitch said. He went over and began to rummage through the shelves. It was a storage-room of sorts, with a long planked table for machine work. There were some old electric motors, old twisted pair wiring. It was a room of discards. Old cans, old paint, old everything. As he looked, Mitch said: "We haven't a hell of a lot of time. We've got to get out of here."

"Aint it the truth," Willie said. "But the wish is father to the thought."

"Do you really have hopes of getting out?" Howard Shaw asked quietly. "Not a prayer, you know. Not the chance of a snowball in hell, Mitch. That sampan *Chochó* is sailing at four A.M." He glanced at his watch. "In twenty minutes. Somewhere offshore she's going to meet another sampan of American registry, and they'll shift the cargo. You don't know where they are meeting; you

don't know the ship she is going to meet. How are you going to stop that?"

"What's aboard the *Chocho*, Shaw?"

"Six flying bombs," Shaw said. "They're all crated like the one you saw outside. They transfer those to the other ship, smuggle them to California. In a couple of weeks, we'll be reading about the mysterious explosion and fire at Vultee or Lockheed or Douglas or Boeing, in the dead of night. It'll go on, too, from now on. Sangamo has the schematic for the whole works. Just gave it to him. They never tortured me. They knew I wouldn't have told. But a man's only daughter is kind of precious. When they conjured up the possibilities, I gave in. I was so doped and dead at that point that I didn't give a damn for anything anyhow. I built eight rigs. They made the planes some place else. At a boat-works in town."

"Are the planes any good?"

"Those jobs can fly ninety miles, if the engine doesn't break down," Shaw said. "And I never heard of a breakdown. They're perfectly wonderful things, and their lifting power is enormous. Don't kid yourself; a bomb with wings is reality now—it's no longer a cartoon in a magazine. As for radio-control of such ships, I think the hams of the United States were experimenting—and with success—in that field for at least three years."

"Six of them," Mitch said. "Damn!"

"The seventh one out there goes up to Rosarito to the airport," Shaw said. "Sangamo's plane is there."

"Is that the same plane that a Baron Falkhorst flies?"

"Uh-huh. He's Sangamo's pilot. He's a marvelous flyer. They took me on the second test, the one where we bombed the sampan—one of his own. Baron Falkhorst doesn't talk much, but he's Luftwaffe. No doubt of it. He got the control of that radio dial so fine, he could make the model ship do anything. Well, he sank the sampan. It was simple."

"Why is it going to the airport?"

"In case the *Chocho* is stopped or pursued by anyone. She calls shore on radio telephone, and the airplane and flying bomb go off to take care of the opposition. It could put a modern destroyer out of action long enough for them to dump the crates overboard. If they are caught with those things, it's a firing squad in Mexico."

"We've got to get out of here," Mitch said.

"Don't be silly," said Shaw. "Sangamo wasn't kidding when he said good-bye. They'll shoot us in here. And very soon. We'll be dead before that sampan sails. Sangamo won't want any slip-up. He probably left a gunman or two to do the job. It oughtn't to be hard."

Mitch had found the paint-closet. There were all kinds of paint in the closet, and there was also turpentine, kerosene, gasoline. Mitch pointed at the closet in amazement. "Gas!"

Shaw nodded. "Petrol, as they say. They use that for testing the model airplane engines."

"Somebody find an empty bottle," Mitch said.

Willie found one under a pile of rubbish. It was an old beer bottle. Mitch filled it with gasoline, found some cheesecloth waste, quite greasy, ideal for his purpose. He stuffed the waste into the mouth of the bottle, turned the bottle upside down so that the gasoline saturated the waste. "Cigarettes out—definitely," he said. "Willie, go over in the far corner, and get behind something, anything. Shaw, you stand by me with a match, light the match, then duck for cover."

"Might work," Shaw said, his eyes alive. "Just might."

"A Molotov cocktail," Willie said. He swallowed. "There's room for two under the table here."

"Okay," Mitch said. "When anybody opens that door, you light the match, Shaw, and then scramble."

For a time nothing happened. Mitch rested the bottle on the table, bent back, all ready to throw it. Shaw had a piece of old sandpaper, and a couple of matches, one in his hand, one on the table for reserve. He stared

at the bottle and held the match. Willie said: "I must remember this one for a climax in a new Charley Chan, if it works and I ever get to play in a new Chan for dear old Darryl."

The waiting was tiresome. Mitch's hand began to ache. He found himself hard, tense with anticipation, his muscles getting sore from their own sharp rigidity.

"What time is it?" he asked, without averting his eyes.

"Five minutes past four A.M.," said Shaw. "They've sailed."

"Do you think Mr. Sangamo went?"

"Oh, no. He's probably at the airport in Rosarito. He has a radio-telephone station there to keep in contact with the ships."

"Some one's coming," Willie breathed. . . .

They tightened again. There was a clicking at the door. It was wary, as though some one were trying to conceal it. Then the door swung open. Miguel Cervantes stood there. He was the executioner. They could see that in the big pistol he held, and in the cold, unreal paleness of his dark skin, which looked greenish. His eyes were hard as diamonds. He spoke six words, "We meet again, as you wished," and that was all he had time for.

The match in Shaw's hand had ignited; the waste burst into flame with an audible puff, and Mitch hurled the bottle at the wall beside the door.

It burst into fragments; there was a roar as the gasoline took up the flame, and suddenly the whole side of the wall was an inferno. The doorway was outlined in fire; Miguel was splattered from head to foot with burning gasoline, and he began to scream horribly. Mitch found his own trouser leg burning; he seared his hands, beating it out. "Get out!" he roared. "Lam, lam!" He saw Willie go, unscratched, and he saw Shaw go. Shaw's hair singed through that fiery doorway. Then he went himself, stopping to retrieve the gun Miguel had dropped.

Miguel had fallen back into the big room, beating at himself. The sound of his pain was chilling, and Mitch gritted his teeth against it. His hands were burned, for gasoline had fired on the barrel of the gun, and the flames danced there on the steel, but he smothered this with a towel which he snatched off the washstand.

THERE was no need to fire the gun. Koji saw them, dropped his pistol and ran in terror. No one made any attempt to stop them. They pounded upstairs, threw the door open. The whole cellar had begun to burn. But they fought their way out onto the street.

Mitch gasped: "Where's your car?"

"Casa Grande garage," Willie Cheng said.

"Pronto," said Mitch. "We'll stick here in the crowd and watch. They won't look for us here again. You're all burned black. I doubt if you'd be recognized."

Willie ran down Calle Oceano and disappeared. Shaw said: "Your hands look rather bad, Mitchell."

"They feel as if I'd dipped them into hydrochloric acid,"

Mitch said. "I'd rather have a baby."

"You ought to stop and get them dressed."

"No dice, Shaw. My luck is riding high, and I can't break the streak. I'm going good now. A guy can't stop when he's going good." He looked out across the harbor toward the Boca. He saw a ship there, past the Boca, outward-bound—a sampan. He smiled grimly. "Yes, my luck is riding high, and I'll play it out to the last gasp. How'd you like to fly like a bird, Shaw?"

"Just dying to," Shaw said laconically. "If you can't find me a hospital, that is."

"You're all right. Your brows are gone and your hair is singed rather short, but you're all right."

The tienda was burning. Not only was the smoke pouring up through the cellar ventilators, but the fire had climbed the wooden staircase and had reached the store proper. They could feel the heat. Despite the early hour, the crowds were really gathering, and they ringed the place.

Mitch felt pressure against his arm. He turned. Amos Porchuck was standing there gravely. "I'm that surprised to see you," said Captain Porchuck. "Free and clear? I've been watching the place. Followed Cheng."

"God, yes," Mitch said. "Glad to see you. Got your clearance papers?"

Porchuck nodded.

"Fine. *Orca* stocked for a sea trip?"

"At a moment's notice, I can sail," said Porchuck. . . .

Willie Cheng had to blow his horn noisily to clear a path for the car. Mitch and Shaw got in. When they left, there was still no sign of the fire department.

"Tour of the city, señor?" Willie Cheng said.

"Rosarito," said Mitch. "The airport. And step on it, Willie, before Sangamo gets the bad news and reads my mind. As he will. The Nipper knows what I'm thinking. Captain—stand by your boat to sail. We'll be back."

"Aye," said Captain Porchuck.

They climbed in the car and left him behind.

"I don't know the way," Willie said.

"I'll show you," Howard Shaw said. "Keep going and bear right at the old *ciudad* and then straight out. There's a signpost you can't miss. My God, the sky is bright! I haven't seen it for two weeks, not since the day they bombed the sampan."

Mitch pointed. "You can see the remains of her."

"Yes," said Shaw. "It's too good to be true, being out here. It's like a reprieve. I don't believe it yet."

Mitch said nothing. He shielded his hands. They were extremely painful. . . .

It took them eighteen minutes to reach Rosarito and the airport. The distance was only nine miles, but the curves were hazardous and they had to cross over the side of the mountain into the valley beyond. They found the airport easily, the big Pan-American hangars plainly visible, a big silver transport on the field.

Shaw said: "Way down there by itself. The white single hangar—that's Sangamo's. He liked the privacy, of course. You can drive right down."

Out in front of the white hangar was the Spartan monoplane. Its propeller was turning over, idling, and a tall man who looked very familiar to Mitchell was standing on the right wheel, leaning into the cabin. They stopped the car and got out, and as they ran Mitch pulled the gun from his pocket.

Baron Falkhorst saw them coming. He climbed down from the wheel and started to run toward the hangar, then saw it was hopeless and stopped. His eyes showed white and he spouted in German, raised his hands. He had no gun. Mitch rounded the corner of the hangar as Ichiro Sangamo stepped out to see what was wrong. They almost ran into each other. Ichiro looked surprised.

Mitch said, panting: "Good morning, little man."

Mr. Sangamo stared at him, then at Shaw, then back at Mitch. "I see," he said, his voice muffled. "It is a pity."

"It is indeed," Mitch said.

He frisked Sangamo quickly: one revolver; some papers. Mitch tossed them to Howard Shaw. "Are these the schematics of the radio control you were forced to give him?"

"The same," Shaw said.

"Do you think he made copies?"

"Impossible. Took me a day and a half to draw those up. I only gave the plans to him early this morning before they brought you in."

"That is just fine," Mitch said grimly. "Baron, take us for a little spin, eh?"

"That is impossible," Baron Falkhorst said. "You know that before you ask, Prescott."

"It makes no difference," Mitch said. "I'd rather not shoot you. I can pilot the ship—you know that. I'd rather spare my hands." He glanced down the field. Daylight was breaking over the Pan-American hangars. "No time to palaver, Baron. Yes, or a bullet. Be sensible."

Falkhorst looked into Mitch's eyes, did not like what he saw there. There was no time for mercy in Mitch's eyes. The Baron said: "*Ja*, I will pilot." He shrugged. "What's done is done."

"Willie," Mitch said, "take Sangamo's gun and in the plane. Where's Shaw?"

"In the hangar."

Shaw came out of the hangar in a moment, pushing the model airplane which they had seen crated in the shop. It looked immense assembled, like a small glider, big enough to carry a child, the fresh paint still smelling on the wings. Shaw looked completely cool and preoccupied, but he was breathing heavily. He said: "I'm too old to be making an athlete of myself. Are you ready, Mitch?"

"Get in the ship, Baron," Mitch said. "Is there radio-
phone to the sampan from the plane, Shaw?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Need help there?"

"Yes. You launch her. Point her into the wind, south-west. Then spin over the propeller. The gas is on full. When she catches hold just hang onto her for a moment and then release her. She'll take off herself. I gather I'm supposed to handle the transmitter?"

"Can you?"

"My God, man, I built the thing. Go ahead. Any time."

FALKHORST had climbed into the monoplane, but the chocks were under the wheels so that he could not gun away. Willie was in with a gun on them. Mitch spun the air screw on the model. It took hold at once and opened up with a low-pitched vicious snarling roar, then tugged out of his hands and started across the field. He watched it go, fascinated. Shaw called to him. He ran and pulled away the chocks and climbed into the plane. There was just room for five in the 7W model Spartan.

"Wait, Baron," Shaw said. He leaned forward. The red high-voltage light of the transmitter glowed, showing it was in operation. Shaw placed his finger in the four holes of the dial and pulsed the transmitter. Four inaudible pulses of r.f. energy were transmitted. The receiver in the flying bomb picked up the pulses, and the relay worked the cam which raised the elevators. The little ship instantly put her nose up into the air and began a long flat climb. "Take her away, Baron," Mitch said. "Any tricks and I'll fly, after we push your lifeless young figure out the side door there."

"It is not necessary to threaten," Baron Falkhorst said. He shoved the throttle forward, opening the engine, and the monoplane moved across the field and rose into the air herself. She was very fast—really too fast.

"The ideal ship for this sort of work," Shaw ruminated as they took after the bomb with alacrity, "is one of these sixty-five-horsepower flying kites. Slow ship. Trouble was this de luxe aircraft is that it overtakes the bomb, is much faster than the bomb, and you have to fly circles to keep the bomb in sight. See her yellow wings there. She's below us to the right."

"You watch it," Mitch said, "and I'll watch Mr. Sangamo."

Nevertheless he glanced down and saw the model. The yellow wings were boldly visible in the morning sunlight. He heard Shaw tell the Baron to level off. They were at fifteen hundred feet. The yellow-winged bomb was about a hundred feet below. Shaw pulsed the transmitter, set the model's controls to neutral. She flew an even course.

"Whole secret with these things," Shaw said, "is the perfect balance of the ship itself. But the radio controls are so finely done, Mitchell, that even in rough air, I could pulse fast enough here to give her right or left aileron and keep her trimmed nicely. Of course, this is pretty crude. Sangamo was in a hurry, like a kid with a new toy. In the Army jobs that I planned to do, the refinements were pretty good. We were—still are, maybe—going to control the engine and throttle by remote radio

control too. The possibilities are mind-staggering. Take a torpedo. Radio-control it. Use it in torpedo-carrying planes. Takes all the risk away. The pilot releases his torpedo a mile or two from the target, behind smoke, then climbs upstairs and guides the torpedo into the target. You can't get out of the way because the torpedo is directive. That would be a much simpler job than what we've done with radio-controlled planes. There would only have to be left or right rudder and neutral. . . . Do you see the *Chocho* yet?"

"No," Mitch said. "She was heading northwest. Take us on a northwest track, Baron."

"He has to circle," Shaw said. "Otherwise he'll run ahead of the bomb. . . . There's a boat down there."

The sea looked jade green in the morning shadows west of Tepic where the sun had not penetrated. Mitch looked down, saw the fishing cruiser of David Adams, a white bone in her teeth, with plenty of salt wake. Mitch took a breath. "Yes," he said. "There goes Adams. And with him is Polly Shaw. Your daughter's aboard there, Shaw."

Shaw looked down. "Thanks, Mitchell," he said softly. Mitch said, "There's the sampan. That dot in the northwest. Where is the bomb?"

"Below and behind us," said Shaw. "Bank around a couple of times, Baron, and let her catch up."

The sampan grew larger. It had no wake. Presently they saw that it was not moving. It was lolling in the sea. Falkhorst took them down to five hundred feet. "Drag her once," Mitch said. "You fly like an angel, Baron."

"Thank you," Baron Falkhorst said coldly. He dragged the ship once, roaring across it.

"Now circle her and keep circling her."

They banked over the sampan.

"Excellent," Mitch said. "Shaw, would you mind warming up the low-frequency radiotelephone and passing the hand microphone back here."

"Certainly," Shaw said.

He clicked on the phone transmitter which the plane ordinarily carried. Mitchell leaned back for a moment. "You have been very silent, Ichiro," he said.

"One is silent when there is little to say," Mr. Sangamo replied.

"I trust you will not remain silent," Mitch said. "I turned on the phone transmitter for you. I hope I can persuade you to use it. The thought of sending that winged bomb down into that sampan appalls me. I don't have much stomach for it. There are men aboard there who probably don't know much of what it's all about. If I tell Shaw to bomb that boat, there are six other crated aerial bombs which will explode too. The result will be quite horrible, and quite unnecessary. You are an intelligent man, but you crowded your luck, and mine is running now."

"What do you wish, Mitchell?" Mr. Sangamo said. "You wish me to call them by radio and tell them to dispense with the crates into the sea?"

"That's the idea, Ich."

"If I refuse, you will bomb them."

"Right. It's no time for mercy. You know that. I haven't come all this way to give up at the last moment. But it seems unnecessary. They'll obey you."

Mr. Sangamo took a sad breath. He glanced down at the wallowing sampan below. "It is unfortunate one must depend upon others than himself," he murmured. "Please hand me the microphone, Mitchell."

Shaw passed it back. Mitch said, "You will tell them what I tell you, and nothing more."

"Yes," Mr. Sangamo said. "But the captain speaks only Japanese."

"Fine," Mitch said, his eyes narrowed. "Then you will speak Japanese. Slow Japanese, so that I may follow it. Call the *Chocho*."

It was spot-frequency work. The *Chocho* came back in the same frequency when they stood by, acknowledged the

call, and stood by for Sangamo to continue. "As follows," Mitch said. "I am captive. The Amerika-jin has the plane. You will throw the crates overboard and return to Del Norte. If the crates are not thrown over within five minutes, the Amerika-jin will bomb you. This is Sangamo speaking. I give the order. Break the crates. Destroy the planes. That is all."

Mr. Sangamo repeated the message in Japanese, slowly. Mitch found himself following it very well. They stood by. The captain of the sampan acknowledged and signed off. Down below, they saw a burst of activity aboard the sampan *Chocho*. Her stern became alive with the crew. The crates were dragged out, their pine tops ripped off. The wings and bodies of the model planes were broken up, the gray bombs lifted out and dropped overboard. They sank at once. The fuselages with the heavier radio control equipment also sank. The wooden parts began to float away.

Mitch watched through binoculars. "Six," he said. "No more, Shaw?"

"Six, check," he agreed. "I built eight. The first, they bombed that sampan in the harbor as an experiment. Six are in the sea below us. The last and eighth is right off our port, flying a very nice shallow bank."

"Okay," said Mitch. "That does it. Let her go."

"I'm just as glad," Shaw said. "I didn't have much stomach for murdering those poor devils. That's what it would have been. Watch."

He dialed the transmitter. Mitch kept his eyes on the yellow winged bomb. It suddenly put its nose down until it was on a vertical plane, and it dived. Shaw dialed neutral on the transmitter to prevent the bomb from going over into an outside loop. The thing plummeted seaward like a stone. Baron Falkhorst eased the monoplane down lower so that they could watch. The terrific speed of the bomb told. The yellow wings fluttered, then ripped from the fuselage and were gone into space. The fuselage continued swiftly, finally struck the sea. They saw the stunning explosion, a geyser of white water, and then flocks of white where the fragments spanked the surface not far from the wallowing sampan. In another minute, there were dead fish floating bellies up, on the water.

Then Howard Shaw, with a screwdriver from the tool kit, unscrewed the transmitter he had used and removed it from the panel of the plane. It was not very large nor very heavy. Shaw told the Baron to bank, meanwhile opening the window beside him. When the plane put that wing down, he dropped the transmitter out the window. It fell for what seemed a long time—and splashed into the sea.

"*Requiescat in pace*," said Shaw.

Mitch tapped the Baron's shoulder. "Home, James!"

At the airport, they put Mr. Sangamo in the back of the car and Willie climbed in with him, still holding the gun on him. Shaw got in front. Mitch smiled at Baron Falkhorst. He said, "I am afraid I will have to take your employer along, Baron. So that washes you up here. It was very nice knowing you, and I do hope I never have the pleasure of meeting you again."

Baron Falkhorst nodded curtly. "Perhaps, some other time, Prescott. *Auf wiedersehen*."

Shaw drove the car. Mitch's hands were in no condition for that. "We've got to move out of here," said Mitch. "We're sailing. Drop me at Casa Cervantes for my bags. Then to Casa Grande for Willie's stuff. Leave the car here, Willie, and arrange for the hotel to ship it north by ship. Then we go to the *Orca* and we blow."

Mr. Sangamo said, "And where will you drop me, Mitchell? At the police station, possibly?" He smiled. "No," Mitch said. "You don't seem impressed with your fate."

Mr. Sangamo shrugged. "Are you going to kill me?"

"Not at all."

"Then I have no fate. You can hardly do anything else, Prescott San. You wish the law to know as little of this interesting episode as I do. It has been a game of chess and you have checkmated. And that is all." He shrugged. "You may drop me at Casa Grande too. Perhaps we shall meet again."

"Forgive me," Mitch said, "if I do not drop you at Casa Grande. I have found you so very, very charming that I cannot bear to part with your company. Accordingly, I have made arrangements with Captain Porchuck for you to sail with us. We are leaving hurriedly this morning, by sea, quite legally, for the United States. It is known to me that your presence will be welcomed in the United States. Indeed, Mr. Sangamo, in that country, they have very stringent laws on kidnapping. You did not think I would leave you behind, Ichiro? To do this over again?"

Mr. Sangamo's face was blank, his eyes showed nothing, but he said quietly, "You are taking me back with you?"

"Yes," Mitch said grimly. "It has been so interesting!"

They had reached Casa Cervantes. He got out and went upstairs. He cleaned up quickly, and changed his clothes. His hands were a mess, and very painful. He packed his bag with celerity and came downstairs. Doña Maria was behind the desk. He paid her off and listened to her babbling in Spanish about how wonderful he was and about Dolores. She spoke too fast but he finally made out that Al Roche had called. He couldn't wait to hear the details. He left.

They drove to Casa Grande then. Shaw stayed in the car, took over a pistol, and watched Ichiro Sangamo. Willie Cheng ran in and went up to get his things and check out. There was a doctor registered in the hotel; Mitchell Prescott visited him and had his hands treated and bandaged. They felt much better. When he came downstairs again, he found Al Roche in the lobby.

"Hey!" Al said. He came over and shook hands. "How are you? What happened to your hands?"

"Cigarette ash," said Mitch dryly. "I'm in a hurry, Al. I can't stick around. I'm checking out of this town. Home-ward-bound—'Home for Thanksgiving,' just like old Currier and Ives."

"Fine," said Al Roche. "I'm doing the same thing myself in the morning. I gave you a buzz at your hotel this morning to make a date with that dame you mentioned, and you wasn't there and she was, so I told her who I was and she came over. I took her out in the Lido and Buzz Wallace—that's his band's been playing here—he tickled the ivories while she gave out with a song. Well, the kid has a nice set of pipes, and she dances swell, and she's got the kind of a figure that a sweater will make a great actress out of her, you know what I mean? So I signed her."

"That's fine," Mitch said, his voice warm. "Give that kid a break, Al. And don't cut her throat."

"Listen, I gave her a fair break. Fifty bucks a week to start, and options then."

"She'll need an agent," Mitch said. "I can see that. I'll have Willie take her under his wing. So you found talent after all."

"Yes," Al said. "She's quite a *muchacha*. I found one piece of talent, but, Mitch, I'll never leave home again. Mexico, the land of thrills and romance and adventure! My God, it was the deadead damn' tomb this side of the equator. People come, people go. Like me. I go tomorrow, thank God. Look me up in Hollywood sometime."

"Sure," Mitch said. "*Hasta la vista*."

He went out to the car. Polly Shaw was sitting in front, beside her father. "Hello," she said.

"You didn't go!" he whispered. "Municipal Pier, Shaw—Captain Porchuck is waiting there with the *Orca*."

They went down Calle Oceano rapidly.

"I didn't go," she concurred.

He looked severe. "Why not?"

"Because I didn't love Dave. I told him so." She touched his bandaged hands. "You're hurt."

"You should have gone. Did you have to be in love with the guy to sail with him? I wanted you out of here. It was dangerous for you to stay. If anything had gone wrong, they could have held you as hostage for your father's return. We've just been lucky."

They reached the pier and got out. Willie Cheng herded Mr. Sangamo ahead onto the *Orca*. Mitch said, "Lock him up some place, Captain."

"I'll lock him up in my berth," Porchuck said. "We can batten down the hatch topside. That's the only way in or out. I'll search him for matches or a knife. Otherwise he can't do anything."

"Okay," Mitch said. "Then sail at once. We can tie up in Acapulco tonight and start out early tomorrow."

THE sea was placid as they went out through the Boca and met the long slow rolling swells of the Pacific. On the flying bridge, Captain Porchuck brought her head around and pointed it north-northwest. The boat kicked right along, her twin engines singing.

"Are you a good sailor?" Mitch asked Polly.

"Yes."

"Then you're the galley slave," he said. "You'll find plenty of stores below. Lunch for four hungry men. I imagine Mr. Sangamo will have lost his appetite under the circumstances. Besides, I want to see if you can cook."

She looked at him, her eyes soft. "Mitch!"

"Polly," he said gently, "do I have to say it? You know I'm in love with you. I've been in love with you since the day they gave me the file on you and said for me to go find you and your dad. You know that. Anybody knows that." His voice dropped. "I always said I wouldn't do it, Polly. Not in my racket. It's not so good. You sit and you wait and you're afraid that some time I won't come home. Somebody has to do this kind of dirty work; we can't all sit before the fire and have the little woman bring out the slippers. Some one has to take care of the termites, or the house'll fall in. That's the way it is."

"But just waiting," she said, "would be helping. If you loved me."

"If I loved you!" He pulled her to him and kissed her soundly. "Even Mr. Sangamo could hear the rush of my blood, away up there in the bow, when I think of you."

"Afraid not," Willie Cheng called. He dropped down into the cockpit, having come across the boot-top of the cruiser. "Sorry to interrupt, cookie, but Mr. Sangamo has double-crossed you."

"What do you mean?"

"He's run out on you, cookie. I guess he didn't want to see the Promised Land. He's taken a run-out powder. I think the powder was cyanide. He's dead."

Mitch nodded quietly. "When we get offshore, slide him over the side."

"Yes, cookie."

"Incidentally, Willie, remind me to tell you about taking care of Dolores Cervantes in Hollywood. Roche signed her on."

"Was she that little doll he was eating with when I went by the café on the way in?"

"Probably."

"Yes, my boy," Willie said. "I will care for the little Mexicali rose to the utmost of my ability. And who will keep the wolves from Polly's door when we get home?"

"The head wolf," Mitch said. "Don't be obvious."

Willie's voice was dry. "She'll cut you down to a lamb's size," he said. He suddenly thought it was very funny. He began to laugh. They could still hear him as he climbed up by Captain Porchuck and faced the north, the wind whipping his black hair. "Oh, to be in Hollywood, now that spring is here," he said. "That land of myrrh and incense, of milk and honey, where the sun shines bright and it aint gonna rain no more, where marriage is convenient and divorce is hereditary—California, here I come!"

Shelled out Of the Sky*

The Japs used the sneak punch in their 1931 attack too.

by CHARLES SLOAN

COLD and clear it was on this Sunday in December. The autumn haze that for weeks had made the sun a yellow, sticky ball had vanished to the northward before the cool winds born in the icy regions far to the south at the bottom of the globe.

The long ocean rollers broke in crashing cadence over the rocks or smashed into spume against the pilings. Miles away there lay a peaceful city basking in the sunshine of the afternoon; a city gay with smiling streets thronged with boys in khaki and in blue, scuttling hither and yon to the accompaniment of the chatter and laughter of their girl companions. It was the day after payday in this city where thousands of soldiers and sailors had been gathered. But more than that, it was a day which lay squarely between weeks of suspense—and months of foreboding for the future.

It was a peaceful scene that I saw spread out before me that afternoon in the fifty-mile circle of my vision, for I was just a newspaper man, flying high above a landscape which within hours was to be turned into a miniature hell.

Far off to the north, over the heaving waters I could see a number of oblong dots, and in the center of them two larger rectangles. I knew them for what they were; a fleet of the men we'd nicknamed "chinless wonders," a fleet of the Mikado, Hirohito of Japan. And the larger vessels? Aircraft-carriers.

No, there was no warning. Certainly none of those who so carelessly wound their way through the streets and alleys of the city near by had any knowledge of what was to come. Certainly none of the lounging soldiers at their emplacements along the seashore or on the far banks of the harbor suspected anything of hostile nature in the immediate moment.

But it came. There seemed to be a sudden grouping of those tiny dots, a slow advance toward the still distant shore. Tiny flies seemed to buzz off

the decks of the two carriers, and slowly circling, mount into the infinite in which we were calmly cruising.

And even as they straightened out and headed toward that harmless city, there came the little puff-balls of slate-colored smoke from the decks of the warships; the upper air began to churn in the passage of swift messengers of steel and death.

It caught that sprawling city by surprise—intense surprise. I could almost imagine the intensity of that surprise, the dull gaze of those suddenly shocked into realization of what to many of them meant the end of their world, the hurry and skelter to whatever shelter was near at hand.

Far down below us that city of buildings and railway stations and military encampments began to disintegrate before our eyes. Great clouds of yellow dust, of yellow smoke, of yellow flames followed that first impact—an impact of exploding shells and bombs which even at our height rocked our plane almost into unmanageability.

I know it scared the hell out of me; but the poker face of the pilot who was flying with me changed not a whit. He merely pointed, then fish-tailed into space. The world revolved around us; we skittered across the sky like a silver beetle suddenly gone amok.

We had more than an hour's gas-supply left; we didn't dare to land, for the field from which we had taken off already was obscured by the muck of high explosives. To run was impossible; there wasn't another field for a hundred miles; and besides—who'd want to miss that sort of show, especially a newspaper man?

And so we stuck up there, an eyewitness at that unequal battle between military ruthlessness and national barbarity on one hand, and a scattered, semi-military, stunned populace, unprepared for attack, on the other.

It wasn't so new, the idea, of course. Japanese fleets for many years had been noted for their tactics of surprise. Their strategy had always been to

strike an unsuspecting enemy first, kick him in the teeth if possible, and in the ribs as well while he lay supine. They'd done it at Port Arthur in 1905; they'd done it in every succeeding step through which their military clique had climbed its ladder of power.

I don't know how high the trajectory of naval shells can go. I only knew that finally we were well down to fifteen hundred feet, cruising in wide circles, seeking a dot of land somewhere when we could set her down.

By this time the city, rallying to the attack, had begun to reply. From the far banks of the harbor shore, field and anti-aircraft guns had begun to bark and to spread their umbrella puffs into the clouds.

Far to the right of us one of the Japanese planes plummeted down in a cloud of smoke, to disappear in a yellow blossom of flame as it crashed into the ground.

And then. . . I guess I know now how high was the trajectory of those naval shells. We could actually see the thing coming, a tiny speck that grew to a dot and to a shrieking, hissing blot on the sky. And then came a jerk that almost dislocated my neck—and a bit of our right wing-tip suddenly disappeared. That shell had missed us by feet; had gone on its way to its destined thud of death somewhere in the city below.

I still don't know how we landed. All I remember is that the ground was coming up to meet us. I don't remember, even, the shock of the impact; for the next thing I knew a Chinese girl in a white uniform was bending over me, and Dr. Paul Martin, of Shanghai General Hospital, was standing at the foot of my bed, grinning at me.

YES, those are my memories of the treacherous Japanese naval and air attack on the native city of Chapel, just east of Shanghai, back in December, 1931.

It was weeks before I could walk again; today I bear on my body the indelible scars of what undoubtedly was the narrowest escape of a newspaper man's life packed with thrills.

Ten years ago. But not even a leopard, never mind a Japanese, can change his spots in a decade.

As witness December 7, 1941, at Honolulu.

* BLUE BOOK is glad to receive and to print true stories of real experience running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of \$50. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

SOME years ago I happened to be in the Portuguese West African colony of Angola. I had been in Angola long enough to have lost most of my initial enthusiasm for hunting in a region which at times appeared as one vast open-air zoo. As a consequence, most of the time I went about unarmed.

At the time of this particular incident I was in a light truck loaded with three empty gasoline drums, miscellaneous equipment and four natives, one of whom, Justine, sat beside me on the driver's seat. Driving northward along the coast about thirty kilometers south of Ambrizette on the one and only passable motor road, we hoped to reach that trading-post in time to pick up mail and to cross the Rio M'Bigue at full tide, the only time that the hand-powered ferry could operate.

The country through which we were driving was flat and open, covered with grass about two feet high and dotted with isolated clumps of brush and scattered cashew trees. The road was relatively good and I drove more or less mechanically, occupied with calculations of time and tide. Consequently I was no end startled when Justine grabbed my arm and shouted.

I looked. About fifty yards ahead, projecting about half the width of the road from the grass on the left, there was to my startled eye what appeared to be a brown log. But the log, even as I stared, moved slowly out until it lay across the road. I had heard of pythons, but this was the first that I had ever seen.

Reactions from surprise are apt to be instinctive. People who have lived in the southwestern part of the United States learn to run down and crush snakes they encounter along roads, for in many instances a quick glance will identify the crawler as a rattlesnake. If there is any doubt, it is practical to run over it—and investigate afterward. Practice at such performance develops a definite pattern of reactions; step on the gas, look carefully, ready to swerve, to crush, or to pass harmlessly.

I stepped on the gas and stared, not carefully in order to make a quick identification, but in amazement. We must have been clipping sixty kilometers an hour when we struck the python. Had my first impression of the reptile as a log been the correct one, the result could have been little different. The truck bounced high and rattled in every bolt and screw. The rear was a heterogeneous mixture of yelping natives, gasoline drums, canned food, bed-rolls, assorted tools, ropes and junk; the whole convulsed mixture was shrouded in a pall of dust.

A blow struck in haste, anger or in surprise is likely to engender energy and excitement which promptly produces more of the same. We made a

Angolan Interlude

In Portuguese West Africa he fought a giant python with a motor truck.

by HOBART E. STOCKING

circle off the road, the diameter of which was just large enough to keep the truck on two wheels. The circumference was long enough to allow each of the natives in the rear to corral and straddle a gasoline drum, whooping encouragement all the while. A gasoline drum, loose and rolling in the rear of a fast-moving truck, has few equals in the damage it can do to life, limb and the pursuit of happiness.

The circle we made was just small enough to bring us back to the python in the shortest possible time. Apparently its equilibrium had been less disturbed than ours, for it had barely increased its pace, not enough to indicate either fear or annoyance. The second jolt was not so startling as the first, for every man was braced and ready. The gasoline drums bounced and thudded, but the riders held their seats.

I have often wondered what might have been the reaction of a distant and casual observer who noted our commonplace entrance on the scene and our sudden, erratic course. Around and around we went, throwing up clouds of dust, sending mushroom-shaped ant-hills bounding, crashing over small brush, circling around larger clumps, stopping suddenly to avoid a tree, reversing, twisting, rotating around and around. Peaceful monkeys eating cashew fruit were surprised, then terrified as we whooped madly around their isolated tree.

We surprised a wild dog stalking a brush-buck and probably saved its life as we gave alarm. The buck was off like a curving shot, with the dog in wild pursuit. Without so intending, we neatly cut in and took the deer-like animal for an around-the-circle chase, while the surprised (and doubtless humiliated) wild dog stood and stared at us from the center.

On each round, long or short, we ran over the python. On the nineteenth tour (by actual count) the boys in the back were getting hoarse and the snake belligerent. This time he lay in a massive coil, too large an ob-

stacle to drive over; and as we came close, he cut loose with a vicious strike just as a rattlesnake might strike, but with mouth closed. His head struck the left fender like a hammer, and just as that tool might have done, left a spoon-shaped dent in the metal.

That self-inflicted blow must have jarred the python, for the coils loosened slowly and it moved away. With careful aim I drove the truck squarely over its head, circled and repeated. There was a mighty threshing as we watched from a distance, and finally the snake lay still. Careful pokings with sticks brought no response; the chase was over, the trophy ours.

It was no small job to straighten out the coils, but eventually we did so. In the fading light I snapped several photographs in hope that one might have the proper exposure. An inch or so over eighteen feet in length and fourteen inches in diameter, the python made an impressive sight, indeed a beautiful one. The geometry of patterns in light brown, dark brown, buff, tan and gray, the symmetry of arrangement and gradation in color and size of pattern, combined to make a beautiful skin.

It was growing late, and there were several miles yet to go if we were to arrive at the Rio M'Bigue at high tide. There was, of course, no time to recover the skin now. Just how much eighteen feet of fourteen-inch python weighs I do not know. It makes a slick, awkward bundle to handle, but five men can handle it, rather gingerly. Looped in massive coils, it filled an ample corner of the truck.

By the time we arrived at Ambrizette the tide had turned and it was impossible to operate the ferry across the Rio M'Bigue against the full force of the released current. There was nothing to do but camp and wait until morning.

The day had been a hard one, aside from the excitement; I was ready for bed and expected soon to be in it. Then Justine reappeared, to report excitedly that the snake was alive.

By a rather feeble flashlight I could see the other boys about ten feet from the truck, watching it with apprehension. I considered them rather foolish and probably frightened; and paying them no further "mind," I marched to the side of the vehicle, took hold of it, put my foot on the hubcap and swung up for a look inside.

Just midway in the upward swing I met the python coming out. It was, I believe, as complete a surprise as I have ever encountered. With my weight on one foot, that knee partly bent, and in motion upward—I simply went on up and back, striking an ineffectual blow with the flashlight as I passed, turned a neat back-flip-half-twist to land upright and in motion. With that start, I came up with, passed and led the natives in a brisk, short dash. We moved through the darkness in a compact group, and when I

stopped suddenly, I found myself at the bottom of the pile of arms and legs.

African natives have seen so much of wonders belonging to white men that they tend to regard the marvels of their own country as commonplace. When, in the progress of work, anything goes awry, they have the faculty of figuratively squatting on their haunches, prepared to see all difficulties removed by another white man's miracle. I was not surprised, but I was disconcerted to have Justine thrust into my hand a half-pound ball-pein hammer with a ten-inch handle, saying with confidence and in effect: "You fix it."

Armed with a flashlight and the hammer, I approached the truck with caution, prepared but reluctant to discharge the white man's burden. To my eyes, the darkness was impenetrable and the flashlight was not very

strong; the natives assured me that the python, or most of it, was still in the truck, with a mere three or four feet projecting overboard. Coming within range of that, and pushing the flashlight close in order to dazzle the reptile, I struck it a blow on the head. It quickly retreated to the darkness of the truck. I waited, and soon it appeared at the same place; the blow was repeated. There were several more repetitions, and it seemed as if the game might continue all night. Just why the snake did not choose another point at which to emerge I could not guess; but the next time, watching carefully just the instant the python's head was on the edge of the solid wood of the truck body, I gave it a hard blow. A quick retreat was followed by a long silence. Peering over the opposite side of the truck, it was obvious that at last the reptile was dead.

It was not so long ago I was walking my dog down a street in Saranac Lake. A venerable gentleman passing by, halted suddenly, glanced at me keenly and said:

"Pardon me—you look like an old friend I knew in the Philippines. His name was Tex O'Reilly."

I glanced at him keenly, and said: "And you remind me of an old friend. His name was Lieutenant 'Nooky' Shelbron."

Then each of us took another keen glance, and sure enough it was us! We adjourned to a place where there were tables, and an understanding waiter, and eagerly proceeded to back-trail over the years. It was a long trail starting more than forty years ago in the Philippines, and winding along the Mexican border through several revolutions.

When I first knew Lieutenant Shelbron, now Colonel Shelbron, retired, he was a young second "looney" in the Third Cavalry. He had come up the hard way from the ranks, which was no easy job in those days, requiring years of enlisted service, and stiff examinations. I was a kid soldier in the Native Scouts.

Our troops were chasing the rebels through the mountains of northern Luzon, and the Third Cavalry and Scouts frequently served together. I was acting top sergeant of a detachment of scouts mounted on little native ponies known as the "Mosquito Fleet." Lieutenant "Nooky" commanded a similar detachment of cavalymen from the Third. On many hikes our outfits were thrown together, and I found myself serving under the command of Lieutenant Shelbron.

In looking back at events long past, it is the little humorous things that pop up in the mind instead of the

The Fierce Chicken

Memory, asserts Major O'Reilly, brings back little humorous episodes rather than battles and campaigns.

by **TEX
O'REILLY**

battles and campaigns which at the time seemed so important. One such incident occurred in the little town of Pilar, deep in the mountains of Ilocos Norte.

We had swooped down out of the mountain trails into Pilar in pursuit of a bunch of *insurrectos*. The *insurrectos* had just as promptly swooped out of the town, and faded away into the jungle hills. Our orders were to camp there and wait for another column expected next day.

The fellow that wrote, that "civilized man cannot live without dining," should have been on that hike. Two weeks before, we had started with the usual field rations of hardtack, bacon and prunes. Hardtack we still had, but were down to our last sliver of bacon, and fresh out of prunes.

Lieutenant Shelbron lined us up in the village street to give us our orders.

These natives of Pilar were supposed to be friendly; at least they were not carrying guns. We must treat them politely, and there positively must be no looting, not even one chicken or handful of rice. Even as Nooky talked, the eyes of the men were staring hungrily at a bamboo-fenced yard scarce a hundred yards away. It was a chickenyard, and more than a hundred impudent fowl were clucking around in a most insolent manner.

As a sergeant it was my duty to obey orders and set a good example; but I do not like to be insulted by a fool hen, especially when I am very hungry. So it came to pass that after the guard was posted and the Lieutenant out of sight, I came to mortal combat with a hen, and the hen gave up its life without a squawk. They don't teach that trick in the army, but every soldier knows how it's done. Not wanting to be embarrassed by being caught, I sneaked out of the village to where I had seen an irrigation ditch thickly screened by tall reeds.

Squatting by the stream, I proceeded to pick and clean my trophy. Suddenly I heard someone floundering through the reeds on the opposite side of the narrow ditch. Then the reeds parted, and there stood the commanding officer, Lieutenant Shelbron, with a defunct chicken in his hand.

"You heard what I said about chicken-stealing?" he asked sheepishly.

"Yes sir," I replied gazing pointedly at the evidence of his guilt. "But this was a very fierce chicken; it attacked me."

"Well, I guess a soldier has a right to defend himself," he admitted. "These hens look like rebels, anyway." So we cleaned our victims, and slipped

back to the campfire to enjoy our stolen meal. . . .

Ten years jogged along. I had gadded around the world, fighting against dictators in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Honduras. In the cause of *Libertad* and Democracy, I had tried to civilize the world with a machine-gun. Although the results do not seem apparent in this war-maddened world today, I still think I fought on the right sides.

Then came another insurrection, in Mexico; and by accident, as usual, I found myself mixed up in it. I was in the *insurrecto* army under Francisco Madero, fighting against another dictator, Porfirio Diaz. Our field of operations was in northern Chihuahua, in the Ojinaga district.

After a few small fights in the mountains back of the town of Ojinaga, our troops under Colonels José de la Cruz Sanchez, and Toribio Ortega, moved to the American border at the village of Mulato on the Rio Grande. We wanted to recruit up, and receive the smuggled arms which were trickling over the border.

My job was a busy one. I had to ride almost daily to the town of Presidio more than twenty miles away, sending wires, receiving mail, transporting money and paying for supplies. One day while waiting for the mail at the Presidio post office, I saw a long line of American soldiers winding down off the mountains. It was a troop of the Third U. S. Cavalry from the railroad at Marfa, seventy miles away. When they arrived, I discovered that the troop was commanded by Captain Nooky Shelbron, my friend and fellow-chicken-thief from the Philippines.

We had quite a powwow. He explained that he was sent to patrol the river and enforce neutrality. He had heard that I was an officer in the Rebel army—"You know how people will talk." No questions would be asked, but it would save much embarrassment for both of us if I did not get caught. Even I can take a hint. I was very careful after that not to run into the American patrols. If I happened to run into one while unlawfully crossing the river, it would be my face that would be red.

It was not long before we were able to stage a real battle for the benefit of Captain Shelbron. The Federal force at Ojinaga, under old General Luque, moved down to match a fight with our outfit in Mulato. Captain Shelbron marched his troop down the river to referee the contest.

It was a dandy row, lasting about ten hours. With only about one thousand troops on each side, all the "elementos," that is, cavalry, artillery and infantry, were used. There was shrapnel bursting overhead; two machine-guns were chattering; charges

and counter-charges were made on horseback and afoot. It was a good show, and Captain Shelbron and his troop watched it like an audience in the bleachers only a few hundred yards away on the American side of the Rio Grande.

If I do brag about it a little, our cowboy army whipped the eternal dictatorship out of that bunch of Federals. Late that night, after the firing stopped, they buried their dead and stole silently away.

It was important that a dispatch reporting our battle should be sent to our superiors in El Paso, and I was elected to send it. We knew where the American guards were stationed at darkness, and I thought I would have no trouble slipping by them. About three o'clock in the morning I mounted my horse, quietly forded the shallow river, and started up a dim cow-trail leading away from the danger-zone.

It so happened, however, that Captain Shelbron deserved his reputation as a fine field soldier. He had changed his outposts after dark, and I rode right into his camp. When I heard a sharp challenge: "Halt! Who's there?" I felt like answering like the recruit in Cuba: "A frightened friend."

Captain Shelbron received me with exaggerated politeness. Would I dismount, have some coffee? A trooper would unsaddle my horse; really, I must stay until daylight. It did no good to explain that I must be getting along, I wasn't sleepy, and I didn't want any coffee. My horse was unsaddled and led away.

"You know, Tex," the Captain explained, "I watched that fight all day through my field-glasses. I saw a strange thing. There was a fellow there that must have been your twin brother. Just as tall and ugly, and he rode a sorrel horse, just like you.

"For fear that some sentry might mistake you for that twin brother, you'd better sleep with us tonight. You're not under arrest, you understand; but if I catch you sneaking out of camp before daylight, you'll get shot right where the back loses its respectable name."

So, to save embarrassment, I stayed in the camp. Next morning when daylight revealed that the Federals had disappeared, I was permitted to deliver my message.

AFTER that victory at Mulato the Rebels decided that they were strong enough to move up the river and lay siege to Ojinaga. We marched up at daybreak one morning, drove the Federal outposts in, and established a patrol around the town. For several weeks there were raids and sorties, but gradually we tightened our loop.

Again it was my duty to make frequent trips across the river. It was

getting to be a tough game. I had to dodge the patrols of Federal *rurales* on the Mexican side, and the American soldiers on the north bank. It was illegal to cross the Rio Grande at any point except the recognized customs ford, and as that was under the guns of the Federals, I was forced to be a lawbreaker.

Then came that sad afternoon when I made a double error, and collided with both parties. I was wending my way alone through the mesquite, headed for a secret ford, when suddenly I heard the clatter of pursuit, and saw a patrol of a dozen *rurales* on my trail. I was cut off from retreat, and cut off from the ford. To reach the American bank was my only hope. Quirting my horse, I headed for the nearest shore of the river, and I'll admit I did some fancy running. The *rurales* lent wings to my going by taking long-distance pot-shots at me.

It was no time for bravado. The present had caught up with me, and I hit that river on a high, hard gallop. Like Paul Revere, I splashed through the water in a cloud of spray for about two-thirds of the distance across. Then happened that disaster that every ranchman along the Rio Grande must dread; my horse bogged down in quicksand.

Desperately I tried to force him on, but he sank up to his withers. Stopping only to jerk my rifle from its scabbard, I sailed right on over his head. Wading, wallowing, fighting to keep from being sucked under by quicksand, by good luck I struggled out on the dry bank, and stopped to catch my breath.

Then suddenly, like a figure of fate, Captain Shelbron came riding at the head of a patrol out from the shelter of the willows. He halted his horse and gazed silently down at me.

I was wet, and covered with mud and sand; also mad and badly scared. Sternly the Captain looked me over, and I said nothing. It was not my turn to talk. It was the episode of the stolen chicken repeated, but this time I was the only guilty one.

"Tex, I never believed it before, but I do now," he said at last in a tone of bewilderment. "Even when I was a little boy going to Sunday school, I didn't believe it, but you proved it."

"What the devil are you talking about?" I demanded. "Believe what?"

"That Christ walked on the water," he replied. "You did it."

Well, to finish the tale, we took the town; our government was recognized, and I was not punished for violating the neutrality law.

So that is why my patient old dog Hussy got no exercise the other day when I met Colonel "Nooky" Shelbron, U. S. A. Retired, on the street in Saranac Lake.

SOME years ago when I was spending a few days in San Francisco, Herbert Ross, who had a connection with one of the newspapers there, invited me to accompany him to a suburban town where he was going to call on a hermit. I thought calling on a hermit might be interesting. It was something I had never done.

On the way across the bay Ross told me that the hermit had been a miner in the days when gold was still being found in "them thar hills," and that he was supposed to have some bagfuls of the yellow dust hidden in his retreat or somewhere near it. That, however, was a matter which the old man refused to discuss, and Ross had no intention of questioning him about it. His purpose was merely to make a friendly call.

Our hermit was not doing penance for his sins. That became evident as soon as he began to speak. His vocabulary consisted largely of words that were generally considered unfit for publication. We found him in a small house which he had built in a section of the town where the buildings were widely scattered. Back of it there was a deep, narrow yard in which he raised chickens. The yard was shut in on three sides by high board fences. The back of the house prevented intrusion from the fourth side.

The former miner, with whom Ross had somehow established a fairly warm friendship, welcomed us with an outburst of oaths which were evidently intended to banish formality and standoffishness. He had long white hair and a flowing beard, and might have sat for a portrait of Walt Whitman.

His shirt was open at the throat; his trousers were tucked into high boots; and there was a heavy rumble in his voice.

HIS first demonstration of cordiality after we had entered the house was the production of a jug and some tin cups. I expected after taking a sip of the stuff he had poured from the jug that it would eat holes through the tins, but it couldn't have been as bad as it tasted, for the hermit emptied his cup, and still lived.

In addition to being a character, he appeared to have a genius for carpentry.

With evident pride he showed us how, by pressing an innocent-looking nail-head or the slotted end of a buried screw, he could cause a panel to open in a wall or let one end of a heavy beam fall from the ceiling. The position of the beam permitted the loosened end to drop just inside the front door. A rope attached to it by a hidden pulley arrangement arrested the fall of the beam within a couple of feet of a floor.

The Hermit Shoots

A recluse demonstrates his arsenal not wisely but too well.

by FORREST BROOKS

"That," the hermit explained, "is to discourage any damn' snooper that tries to do any snoopin' in here."

He asked me then to move my chair; and when I had done so, he touched what looked like a knot in the paneled wall near which he sat. Suddenly a trapdoor opened in the floor.

"If his ornery head aint busted by the beam," he said, "I can just drop him in the cellar, and let him stay there till I make up my mind what to do with him."

"Have you ever trapped anybody?" Ross asked.

"Not yet," the hermit said, "but I'm damn' good and ready when the time comes."

There were other ingenious contrivances still to be seen. At the side of each window in the room where we sat there was a wooden strip which looked like a part of the framework. Pressure upon a nail-head within easy reach from a chair in a nook where the hermit could not be seen from outside the house would bring the heavy-weighted panels down edgewise across the windows.

"Let any sneak stick his damn' head through a window here," the old man said, "and I can make him think it's bein' chopped off!"

When he had given us a convincing exhibition of the manner in which the contraptions worked, he invited us to look into his bedroom. I was beginning by that time to think there might be some truth in the story about the hidden bagfuls of gold-dust.

Thus far we had seen no firearms in the place; but when we entered the bedroom, a battery of guns became visible. The muzzles of two of them

were fixed in small portholes in the wall next to the chicken-yard, the stocks resting on the edge of the bed. Another gun, mounted upon a substantial framework, was aimed toward the door.

"If anybody gets a notion to steal my chickens," said the hermit, "I can fill their carcasses with lead, or scare hell out of 'em, anyhow."

He proceeded then to tell us how, by attaching strings to his big toes when he went to bed, he could go to sleep knowing that he was ready to fire instantly if intruders got over the fence and in among his precious chickens.

"At the first squawk," he boasted, "all I have to do is wiggle my toes, and bang, bang! I figger that a couple of shots'll be enough to make 'em fer-git what they come fer. But if that don't do it, I've got this."

He took a blue-barreled revolver from under his pillow, pulled a slide back from an opening in the wall, and showed us how he could go on firing, without getting out of bed. The gun that was aimed toward the door could be fired by a pull upon a string fastened to the trigger and tied to a hook which was screwed into the headboard of the bed.

When the hermit offered to take off his boots and shoot into the chicken-yard, Ross and I told him we were anxious to see the thing done, and swearing casually, he got ready to put the loops over his toes.

"Don't touch that knob," he said to Ross, who was leaning against a bedpost, "or your friend'll find himself in the cellar. He's standin' on a trapdoor."

I moved back hastily.

"That's safer," the old man remarked. "I aint takin' no chances. If any sneak gits in here without havin' his head broke or bein' shot through the guts, I can let the floor drop out from under him. As the feller said, there's more than one way to skin a polecat."

BEING ready to shoot by wiggling his toes, he flung himself back into a sleeping position, but in doing so, struck one of his hands against the string that was attached to the trigger of the gun pointed toward the door. Bang it went, and a bullet tore through the inside of my left sleeve. If I had stood a few inches farther to the left it would doubtless have remained for some one else to tell what had happened.

The demonstrations went no farther. Ross and I departed without having heard any references to hidden bagfuls of gold-dust, and I have not since then had any interest in hermits or houses with secret panels and ingenious contraptions designed for cracking people's skulls.

Readers' Forum*

(Continued from page 1)

HE LIKED "AMERICA'S GODFATHER"

The occasion for this note is the story "The Mystery of America's Godfather" by Stefan Zweig. It is the most interesting reading I've ever run across; and that includes the many good stories in your BLUE BOOK.

Author Stefan Zweig is one "whale-of-an-author" to be able to take an apparently "dry" history subject and, without the use of direct conversation on the part of the characters, to produce a narrative that for downright interest surpasses any mystery or "regular" type of adventure story. His subject is one that has interested me for some time, and Mr. Zweig must have done a lot of research work for his material. Hats off to Stefan Zweig for a swell job!

As for any criticism of BLUE BOOK, the only changes I would like to see tried would be these: Have one long, complete novel in each issue. Have your short stories a "little longer" even at the expense of fewer stories. I think the plots could then be better developed. However, these changes are merely suggestions, for I am enjoying the present set-up of BLUE BOOK.

And again—my personal thanks to Stefan Zweig!

Sincerely yours,
Edward Schroer,
Cheviot, Ohio.

DISLIKES HISTORICAL STUFF

BLUE BOOK is, to my mind, the best fiction magazine for a man who doesn't want a lot of mush, but real live stuff. I have bought the magazine for several years, and look for old acquaintances first, like Tiny David. It's a pleasure to read some yarns that do not have bloodshed in them; for after all, old-timers in the West were not gunning for each other all the time. A bit of humor adds a lot to stories, too. I dislike historical stuff, like Stefan Zweig's "The Mystery of America's Godfather." It has no place in a live up-to-date magazine.

And I admire a magazine where one doesn't have to dig out the last part of a story from between ads. Give us a long story each month instead of serials, and keep BLUE BOOK to its present high mark!

Yours sincerely,
Lester I. Jenkins,
New London, Conn.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

NEXT MONTH

Enter: Jimmy Smith

As Jimmy Smith stepped along down the street, he was amused at the prankish appearance of everything. The thoroughfare was so gay with sunlight, so thick with traffic, and so rich with shops; and there was a wonderful, blowing air. He wondered why he hadn't foreseen a day like this. In the open country you could really see the blue, high sky. He felt he should be there, with Joan, and each of

them should be riding a lively young horse.

"I feel," he thought, "that at any moment I might slip up into the air and begin to revolve. I'm just that toppy." But when he discovered that he was in a strange city and that people greeted him by a name not his own, he felt differently—felt flabbergasted, in fact. Be sure to follow his fascinating fortunes in this novel—

by JOHN T. McINTYRE

who wrote "Drums in the Dawn," "Blowing Weather" and "Steps Going Down."

The Knightly Blade

Corporal Air-Gunner Oxnard rather liked these daylight sweeps over the enemy-occupied territory, for they gave him an opportunity to keep up with the adventurous chapters presented in the current issue of his favorite magazine. After all, there was actually very little to do until they were in the enemy area on the other side of the Ditch. . . . And then—the intercom speaker above his left ear began to crackle urgently. It was the voice of Sergeant Croft, the navigator bloke.

"Hi, Oxnard! What about that blighter on our tail? Is he a cousin of yours?"

Tatters glanced up and spotted the two-engined Messerschmitt 110 moving in for a tight angle shot. He folded the corner of his page down, closed the magazine with due reverence, placed it carefully between the gun supports and the Perspex panel, and then gave his undivided attention to the Jerry annoyance.

"Enemy fighter. Wing-span fifty-five feet," he muttered, repeating his Gunner's litany. "Speed, 250 cruising. Can do 295 at sea level. Distance approximately 130 yards—fills outer ring. . . . Got-cher!" The story goes on from there. It was written, of course—

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

ALSO: "Ancestor Hendryk," a novelette of the Dutch East Indies today, by Gordon Keyne; a complete short novel by Thomas Duncan; and many other lively contributions by such writers as Frederick Painton, H. Bedford-Jones, Bertram Atkey and Joel Reeve—all in the forthcoming May issue of—

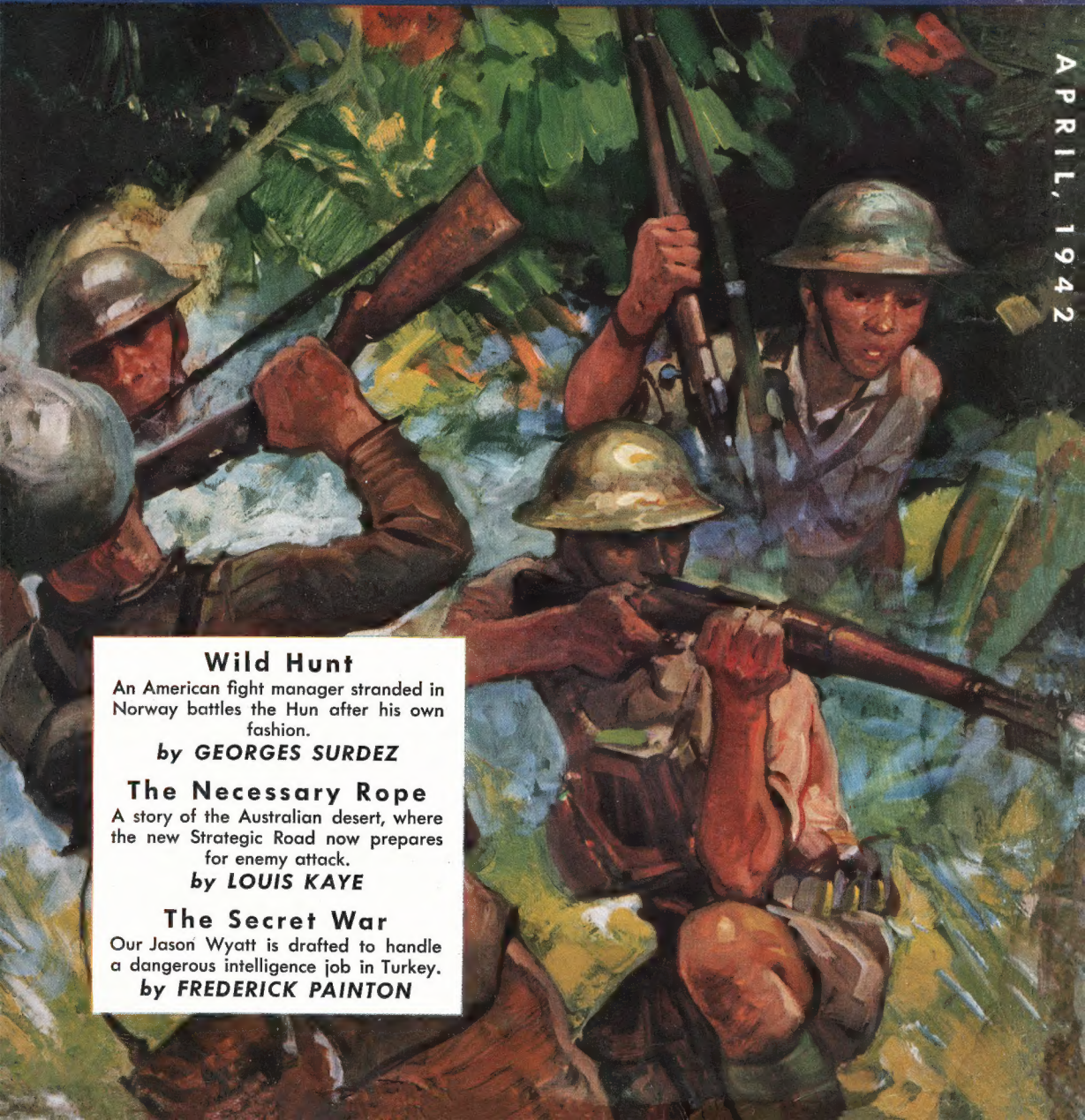
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